

# THE LONDON READER

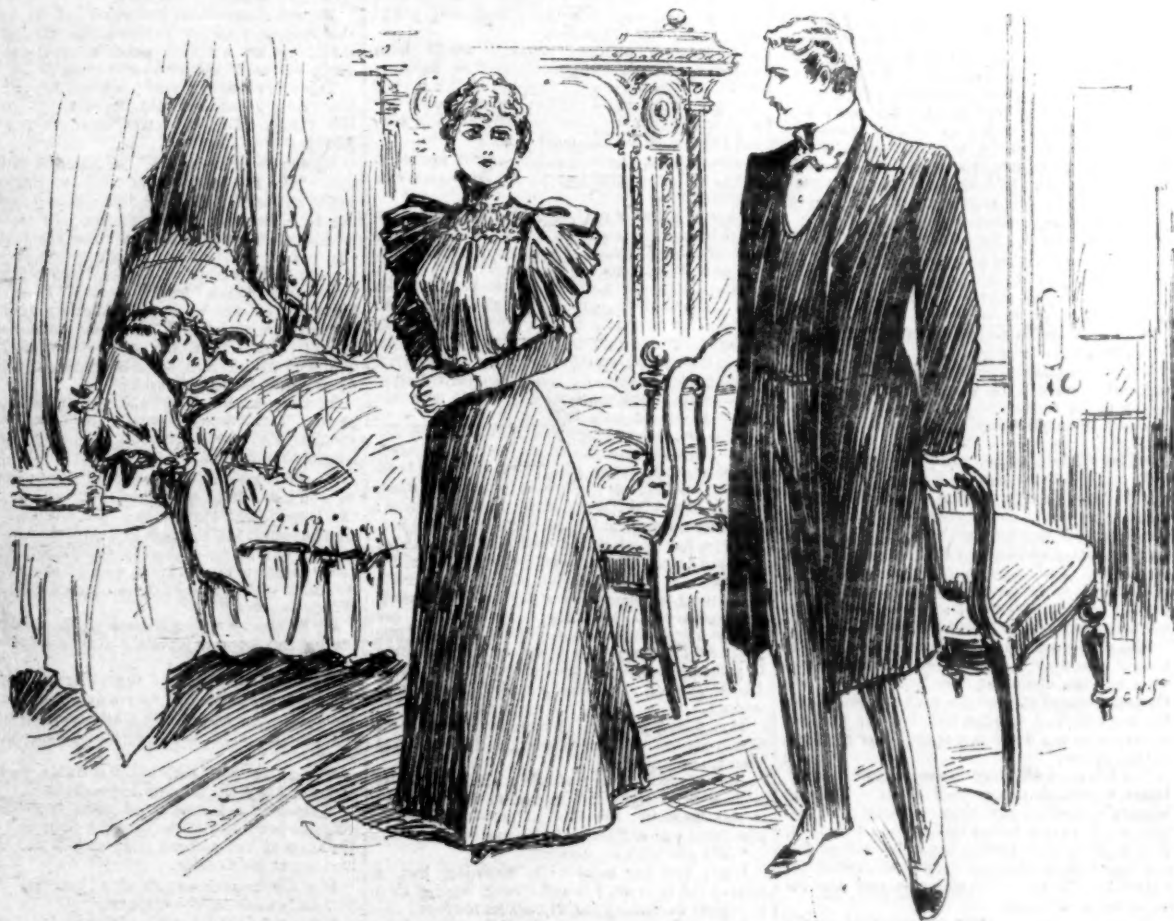
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"YOU DON'T TAKE BACK YOUR PROMISE—WE ARE FRIENDS STILL!" ENQUIRED LINDA, WITFULLY.

## A RESTORED INHERITANCE.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

"WAS ever anything so unfortunate!"

The time was December; scene, the dinner-table of a very comfortable country house, and the speaker a remarkably pretty woman of five or six-and-thirty, but whom you would doubtless have guessed at five years younger, so smooth and unlined was her complexion—so bright and luxuriant her brown hair.

"It can't be helped," said the only other person at the dinner-table—a tall, military-looking man of fifty odd. "Don't vex yourself so, Kate; it won't do any good."

Kate pouted. Sir Henry and Lady Cameron had reached the last stage of their dinner, and so had been permitted at length to escape the Argus

eyes of their domestics. The baronet took advantage of Simmonds, his butler, and his antelopes departing, to confide a piece of news to his wife—a very simple piece of news, and one that ought to have pleased the lady, since it was a stroke of good fortune that had come to a protégée of her own.

"Douglas Anstruther is to be Dr. Ward's partner, Kate," said Sir Henry; and then Lady Cameron gave vent to the exclamation with which our story opens,—

"Was ever anything so unfortunate!"

"Of course it can't be helped," she said, slowly, as though turning over her husband's attempt at consolation; "but does that make things any better?"

"I don't suppose Linda will stay here long."

"We promised this should be her home when she left school. Henry, you know we did."

"And so it shall," said Sir Henry, stoutly;

"but a pretty girl like that is sure to pick up a husband soon, especially when she is an heiress."

"I don't believe Linda will marry young."

"Why not?"

"She is afraid of men—I mean she has got it into her head she is sure to be wooed for her fortune."

"Little goose!"

"I don't see what is to be done," said Lady Cameron, looking positively plaintive. "We can't put Linda off; she must come here, and stay—for years perhaps. And if she is here, she and Douglas must meet—there is no help for it."

"I don't see that it matters."

"Henry!"

"Linda knows nothing."

"Not a word. She hasn't the least suspicion that her father was anything to be ashamed of, but Douglas knows everything."

"Of course."

"Good and true as he is, he is almost morbid on that one point. I think he will be sure to hate Linda just because she is her father's daughter."

"Well, if he hates her it won't signify much. Anstruther is a gentleman. He won't tell the

poor girl that wretched old story; he'll simply not seek her society. Linda need never suspect the truth. Really, Kate, I think you are making a mountain out of a molehill."

"Perhaps," said Kate, dreamily, "but I am very fond of Douglas. I should have liked this house to be a second home to him—I should have liked him to spend all his leisure time here."

"So he shall."

"But it will be like having a thunderbolt hanging over my head to have those two together. I love Linda dearly, but I wish with all my heart you had never consented to be her guardian."

"Mr. Vane never asked me," objected Sir Henry. "His wife was my far-removed cousin, and he took advantage of that to put my name in the will. Thank Heaven, he didn't leave me a farthing! I have nothing to do with the management of his ill-gotten gains. He must have guessed I should refuse to soil my hands with them, for he left all the care of his property to a firm of lawyers, and named me as his child's personal guardian, with the two hundred a-year, inherited from her mother, to defray her expenses until she married or came of age. I couldn't well refuse, Kate."

"No—but it makes it awkward now."

"I think you make the worst of it. Linda knows nothing of the past, and depend upon it no one will enlighten her."

"We shall see," said his wife, mysteriously.

"When will she be here?"

"Linda—on the fifteenth. School breaks up unusually early this year. Poor child! she ought to be accomplished, for she has been at Madame Monory's ever since she was seven years old."

"She will be glad her school-days are over."

In fact the Camerons knew very little of their ward. Miss Vane had been educated in Paris, and all they could do for her was to arrange she should spend the two months of the summer holidays either at Cameron Hall, or with them at some quiet seaside place. But for those yearly visits Linda might have been in danger of forgetting her own language; as it was, her foreign education had left no visible mark upon her.

She was singularly frank and childlike, fond of simple pleasures and home life; in fact, there were but two shadows on her lot—the fear Lady Cameron hinted at, that she might be wooed for her large fortune, and the fact that she had not a relation in the world nearer than her mother's distant cousin.

The fifteenth of December came, and brought Linda Vane back to her native land. Madame Monory's English governess brought her and four other young ladies to London; and then, poor woman, being unable to cut herself in five and accompany them to their destinations, resigned two to their fathers, and saw the remainder off by train.

Linda was the last. Miss Brown stood on the platform inspecting the carriages until she discovered one she deemed perfectly safe, since it was already occupied by an old lady, a poodle, and a parrot.

"You are quite sure you don't mind my not waiting," said Miss Brown, when she had inquired of four different porters whether that was the right train for Templehurst, and received an affirmative reply from each.

"Perfectly," said Linda, readily. "You would only lose your own train, Miss Brown. We don't start for another five or ten minutes."

Miss Brown kissed her warmly—in common with all Madame Monory's establishment she loved Linda—then she walked quickly off to see after her own luggage, and catch the next train to Letcham.

Of course, Miss Vane was safe. The old lady with the poodle and the parrot would be a most effectual chaperon, even if a gentleman—Miss Brown feared gentlemen only second to his Satanic Majesty, for no reason that anyone could make out, for most certainly none of them had ever presumed to accost her without an introduction, or to care to speak to her if already acquainted—ventured to intrude.

Poor Miss Brown! Her confidence would

have been shaken had she remained one five minutes longer.

The guard came round to clip the tickets, and discovered the old lady was in the wrong train, and bundled her, her parrot and the poodle out with scant ceremony.

The whistle had sounded, he was in the act of locking the carriage door, when a gentleman came rushing down the platform, just in time to gasp out a question, receive a satisfactory answer, gain the shelter of the carriage and be locked in, as the train began to steam slowly out of the terminus.

Miss Brown's favourite pupil was shut up with one of the much-redoubted monsters, yclept men, as her sole companion.

A properly disposed damsel would have changed carriages at Cannon-street or London-bridge, Linda never even thought of it; to her unsophisticated mind the gentleman minus luggage seemed an improvement on the lady with the yelping poodle and noisy parrot.

She ensconced herself in her corner, opened a novel, and was soon lost to all her immediate surroundings.

Her companion read the evening paper, or tried to, but there was little in it. He soon flung it aside, and, for want of something better to do, fell to looking at his opposite neighbour.

And Linda was quite worth looking at; she had just one of those faces Grouse best loved to paint; her hair was the tint of brown which always looks like gold when the light shines on it; it was neither straight nor curly, but had an indescribable wave in it; she wore it in the style which came in ten years ago, and will probably never quite die out, because it is at once so simple and so becoming, just coiled low on the neck, the front not cut short, but drawn back, and rippling in waves, which rose from her head almost like feathers; her eyes were blue, dark, intense blue, and fringed with long dark lashes; her features were small and delicately cut; but, perhaps, her chief charm was her complexion; her skin exquisitely soft and creamy, its texture like satin, or which had the bloom of a peach; there were dimples in her cheeks, and her pretty red lips seemed just made for kissing; her cheeks might have belonged to a child of two years old; her eyes had a woman's wistfulness; in point of fact, her character was like her eyes; Linda was an exquisite blending of child and woman.

It is a long journey, as anyone knows, from Charing-cross to Templehurst, and Linda had been travelling all night.

Her novel was very stupid; she dropped it with a little sigh, and turned to the window; it was fastened; she tried to put it down, but the frame was stiff and resisted her efforts.

"Did you wish to open it?"

Linda saw her companion watching her, a man of thirty or so, tall and strong, with a kind of rugged determination written on his face.

"Please."

"It is very cold," he said, doubtfully; "you would be wiser to keep it shut."

"I want to open it."

He touched the window with his strong hand, it flew down, and a rush of cold air poured into the carriage.

Linda drew up the collar of her sealskin and shivered.

The stranger smiled.

"Are you convinced?"

"Quite."

"Shall I put it up again?"

"Please."

"You are very tired!" he said, pityingly, as he looked at her. "Why don't you try to go to sleep?"

"I am awfully tired!" and she gave a weary little stretch; "but one couldn't go to sleep in the train!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know!"

In a moment he had rolled up one of her rugs as a pillow, and when she had put her head on it, he tucked the other over her, by way of counterpane.

"You will be asleep in ten minutes."

"Thank you!" Then, with a sudden fear,

"But I may sleep too long, and get carried past my station!"

"Where are you going?"

"Templehurst."

"I will see you are not carried beyond."

Another five minutes and she was asleep. Douglas Anstruther, watching her, thought he had never seen so fair a face, and wondered what her friends were about to let her go travelling about the world alone.

Utterly ignorant in the coat of ladies' dress, he set down Linda, in her long plain coat, and grey dress, her small unwrinkled felt hat, as a poverty-stricken little damsel.

He would have been electrified had he known the coat cost thirty guineas, the hat, whose simplicity he admired, another two, and the many-buttoned boots the same sum.

There was nothing showy about the girl, but Mr. Anstruther had yet to learn there are few things more expensive than elegant simplicity.

"I wonder who she is!" he thought to himself. "So few people live at Templehurst, it ought not to be difficult to find out her destination! I have it! Of course, she is Mrs. Ward's holiday-governess! I know she told me she was going to get one for six weeks, because she couldn't manage all her children when the boys were home from school. Poor little thing!" and his voice took a softer ring. "I don't think you know what you have undertaken! Tom and Victor are awful rebels, and you look such a frail, delicate little creature to battle with the rough world!"

In fact, as she slept there opposite in such perfect security and trust, Mr. Anstruther thought she looked more fit to be taken care of herself than anything else.

He had rather congratulated his partner's wife on her holiday-governess, who was to keep the house quiet for the two doctors, and take all the worry of the children off their mother's hands; but as he looked at the little maid his heart misgave him. How would that delicate creature ever reduce those turbulent little Wards to order!

He had had some experience of them himself, for he had been a fortnight domesticated with the doctor's family.

A pretty little house at the other end of the village was eventually to receive him, but it would not be empty till Christmas, and then repairs and alterations would make further delay.

"Come to us," said his hospitable partner, and, nothing loth, Douglas had accepted.

Essentially a domesticated man, the doctor's cheerful home had attractions for him, and even the noise of half-a-dozen children had not made him regret his decision.

Linda woke with a start at a junction about half-an-hour from Templehurst.

"Are we there?" she asked, a little eagerly.

"Not yet. Are you rested?"

"Oh! yes; I feel ever so much better. You see," said Linda, forgetting the impropriety of making confidences to an utter stranger, "school only broke up yesterday, and I am so tired."

Of course she was, after a hard term's work as junior teacher in a school. Of course she was "tired"; he only felt sorry more fatigue awaited her.

"Have you been there long?"

"Ever since I was seven years old," she answered, gravely; "more than half my life."

She was an orphan, of course, and had worked up her way as articled pupil to be junior teacher.

"I hope you will like Templehurst."

"I like it very much, what I remember of it. I used to spend my holidays there when I was a little child, but it must be seven years since I saw the old place."

"It is very quiet."

"So I supposed."

"You will like Mrs. Ward, I think," he observed, anxious to say something encouraging.

As Lady Cameron was a great admirer of the doctor's wife, and had repeatedly lauded her virtues to Linda, Miss Vane answered this little



speech as to confirm Mr. Anstruther's mistake.

"I am sure I shall. I quite long to know her."

"Are you fond of children?"

"Very. I suppose she has several."

"Six. I have been staying at Hope Lodge for a fortnight, and I have only just mastered their names and ages."

Linda laughed.

"Ah! I shall prove a better pupil."

And then the laugh died on her lips, the smile faded from his face. Then came an awful sound as of two heavy bodies crushing against each other; the carriage lamp went out.

Douglas Anstruther with rare presence of mind caught Linda in his arms and laid her flat on the floor of the compartment; he knew it was her one chance, then he felt himself dashed violently forward and remembered nothing more.

It was the worst railway accident known in that part of the world. Entering the tunnel just before Templehurst station, the train had dashed into a line of trucks waiting there for some inexplicable reason. Why those trucks had not been removed, and whose fault the neglect was, formed the subject of a long and tedious judicial inquiry, but that could not undo the consequences—four deaths and a dozen people seriously injured.

Douglas Anstruther came to himself in his own room at Hope Lodge, and his partner and his wife stood by him with anxious faces.

"You'll do now," said Dr. Ward, encouragingly. "You've no injury to speak of; you just got stunned. A good night's rest and you'll be walking about as well as possible to-morrow. Thank Heaven it's no worse. I can tell you, Anstruther, the sight at Templehurst station was ghastly."

Mr. Anstruther's thoughts flew back to his travelling companion.

"Where did you find me?" getting round to what he wanted to know by a very circuitous process, because he didn't like to ask straight on.

"Oh! I didn't find you. The porters had identified you and sent you straight here. Barnes of Newton has been helping look after the injured. Very few of them are Templehurst people. Six have been sent to their homes, the others are in the cottage hospital."

"Didn't you expect your governess to-day?" asked Douglas, suddenly. "Miss—, I forget her name, Mrs. Ward."

"Miss Black. Oh! yes. She came by this very train, and wasn't a bit injured. Wasn't it providential, Mr. Anstruther? I have hardly had time to say a word to her, but she seems a very nice capable sort of person."

"A nice capable sort of person." This description as applied to his blue-eyed princess seemed to Douglas little short of blasphemy.

"I wonder how she escaped!" he said, aloud.

"Through the kindness of a fellow-passenger, who at the first, fearing the accident, made her lie flat on the floor of the carriage; that saved her life."

"There were a great many people I know in the train," said Dr. Ward. "Sir Henry Cameron's ward, Miss Vane, was to have travelled by it."

Douglas writhed. From boyhood he had hated the name of Vane. His father and Gilbert Vane had been sworn friends and partners, a twelve years' alliance leaving the senior of the firm stripped of everything he possessed.

Mr. Vane never did anything to bring himself within the letter of the law; but when the firm were bankrupt it came out he had made investments in his wife's name which realised an enormous fortune.

He bought the ancestral estate of the Anstruthers; he left his daughter heiress to half a million of money, while his partner's only son had hard work to complete his medical studies, and literally possessed no penny he had not earned.

Mr. Vane had committed no crime the law could take cognizance of. He had betrayed his

partner and benefactor; had enriched himself and his at the expense of the Anstruthers.

Society would probably long have turned a cold shoulder to him on account of these things, but he died opportunely; and now that eleven years had come and gone there was little doubt that the same people who had condemned Reginald Vane unsparingly would pay court to his heiress. She, at least—they would argue—was innocent of all wrong; it would be cruel to visit the sins of the father on the children.

People always remember this maxim, somehow, when the children happen to be heiresses; when they are penniless it is usually forgotten.

And now he had to bear the name—the name Douglas believed to be seared into his very heart—spoken casually; had to look forward to seeing its owner, for if she was domesticated with his dearest friends the introduction could not long be deferred.

Douglas Anstruther was a brave man, but at this prospect his courage failed him.

## CHAPTER II.

LINDA VANE had been discovered senseless among the ruins of a first-class railway carriage.

Sir Henry never forgot his thankfulness when Mr. Barnes told him she still breathed; a few restoratives and the blue eyes had opened again, and Linda had come back once more to this troublous, workaday world.

"Where is he?"

"Perhaps the strangest question that could come from the lips of a school-girl who possessed neither father nor mother."

"Who?" asked Sir Henry, eagerly.

"The gentleman who was in the carriage with me. He was so kind. Oh! please say he was not killed."

Sir Henry looked puzzled. The young surgeon from Newton took the answer upon himself.

"Killed! not a bit of it, Miss Vane; Anstruther has only got a shaking and a few bruises. He'll be about among his patients to-morrow, for he is Dr. Ward's partner, and I assure you a great favourite already hereabouts."

Sir Henry kept blank silence. He and his wife had resolved to keep Linda and her father's foe apart, at all hazards; now it seemed they had been making friends on their own account.

"Now, child," said the Baronet, when he had collected his faculties, "we must go home. Your aunt will be in an agony of suspense."

It had pleased Miss Linda long ago to assume the relation of niece to the Camerons. She called them uncle and aunt, though no such tie existed between them. She liked it, and so, in truth, did they.

"Not quite killed," was Sir Henry's verdict, as he handed the little creature over to his wife.

"Katy, would you have believed eighteen months could have changed our little girl into such a grand personage!"

The last summer holidays had been spent in Normandy with Madame Monory. It was well nigh a year and a-half since Lady Cameron had seen her.

"She is not altered," said Katy, stoutly, "she is only prettier. Linda, what have you done to yourself?"

"I 'speak I grewed," said Miss Linda, demurely, echoing Topsy's well-known sentiment.

Lady Cameron took her upstairs to the pretty rooms prepared for her, and kissed her again in her glad relief.

"I made sure you would be killed," she said, cheerfully.

"I might have been, only a gentleman made me lie down; he put me flat on the floor."

"And then?"

"I expect the collision came. I remember nothing more, only I feel now he saved my life."

"We must find him out, and thank him."

"He was so kind," said Linda, enthusiastically. "He took care of me all the way, as if he had been my brother."

"I wonder where he lives."

"Here," said Linda, dreamily. "I think he said he was staying with the Wards."

"With the Wards!" and Lady Cameron's voice faltered in spite of herself. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. I think he is Dr. Ward's partner."

"Douglas Anstruther!"

"Do you know him?"

"He is one of our most intimate friends."

"I am so glad," said Linda, thankfully, "because then I can thank him."

Lady Cameron would have excused her from dinner that night, but Linda preferred to come to it.

Very fair and innocent she looked in a loose white dress, fastened at the waist by a Roman scarf. Her guardian's wife thought she had never seen anyone so charming as this girl, with her Greuze face and pretty, winsome ways.

"There is only one word for her, Henry," she told her husband later on.

"And that is—"

"Bewitching."

"I dare say a great many men will be of your opinion. I don't think you need regret my guardianship, Katy; that girl won't stay with us long."

Mr. Anstruther spent that evening in the solitude of his own room.

There had not been much romance in his life hitherto. He had lived his thirty years without once meeting a woman's face that touched his heart. He had been a busy life, without much time to think of love. He had never given a second thought to any woman, had never thought of such a sweet possibility as a wife until he watched that slight grey-robed figure sleeping opposite him in all the security of her innocence all the faith of her childhood.

And now he was in the same house with her; they would be thrown daily and hourly into contact. He looked forward to the intimacy with a strange, mysterious pleasure. But of one thing he was resolved—he would see her first alone. They had parted in dire peril, they should not meet again with even such kindly eyes as Mrs. Ward's to spy upon them.

So he got up early, and went downstairs, hoping that chance would favour him.

And chance did. Lillian Ward, the doctor's eldest girl, a pretty sprite of nine, met him on the stairs. He stopped to ask her opinion of the lady her mother called a "nice, sensible sort of person," and he deemed a "sweet child."

"Well, Lily, what do you think of your new governess?"

Lily's reply was short and conclusive.

"I hate her."

Mr. Anstruther felt as if a shock of cold water had been poured over him. He had always believed children and animals to be correct judges of character.

"Why, dear!" he asked, pleasantly.

"She's so ugly."

"Nonsense!"

"But she is," repeated Miss Lily, positively.

"You just go into the schoolroom and see."

"Is Miss Black there?"

"Yes."

"And alone?"

"Of course she's alone," replied Miss Ward, glibly. "We all hate her, even baby. It isn't likely we'd go and sit with her unless we were obliged."

It did not sound promising. But, then, Lillian was always accounted the spoilt child of the family. Her evidence might be prejudiced, so Douglas pushed open the door of the schoolroom, and advanced quickly, a grave expectancy on his face.

Where was the childish figure—where was the sweet Greuze face—of his little companion?

Someone was poking the fire vigorously. The someone turned round and confronted him.

He saw a tall bony woman, who might have been any age from twenty-nine to fifty, so thin that her dress sat in plaits. Her sandy hair was surely coloured nowhere but in Scotland; her weather-beaten face was angular and wrinkled; her hair too scanty, its parting too broad; her

dress of a broad Tartan plaid positively set Mr. Anstruther's teeth on edge.

And yet, there was nothing repulsive about Miss Black. She was just a plain, sensible, homely woman, as Mrs. Ward had said. She was judicious and painstaking to the backbone; and if she had not the gift of winning children's hearts, remember that when a woman has had to get her living for any number of years by teaching children and being constantly with them, what little charm of manner she once possessed may well have died out if there was no natural love for the little creatures to soften her heart.

"Miss Black!"

"That's my name," said the good woman, readily enough; "and you're the doctor's partner, I expect. They said you were in the train. It's a narrow escape we both had, Mr. Anstruther; and I've been thinking we ought to be thankful."

There were tears glistening in her mild eyes. Douglas wrung her hand. It was cruel to blame her for the disappointment, which from first to last was caused by himself.

"I am sure we ought. I hope this untoward beginning will not have prejudiced you against Templehurst, Miss Black. My friends have been looking forward to your arrival."

"Aye, but she's a sweet face," said Miss Black, heartily. "The mother, I mean. And what a girl she seems to have all these children! And none of them come up to her."

"They may, in goodness, later on," said Douglas. "Yes, Mrs. Ward has a sweet face, and she's a good, true woman. I don't wonder you're surprised; it took me some time to realise she could have boys as old as Tom and Victor."

"Tom's eleven turned, he told me."

"And his mother is twenty-nine. They married early, and the children came apace. But I don't think it's an unhappy home, Miss Black. The mild eyes glistened again.

"I never saw such a happy one. I've not been here twenty-four hours yet, Mr. Anstruther, but I've managed to find out that."

In a day or two the children had ceased to "hate" Miss Black. They found her good and kind, and respected her; but they never gave her any of that spontaneous love, those unshaken caresses, children lavish on their favourites.

Mr. Anstruther was left with an unsolved problem. Who was his pretty friend with the Greuze face and blue eyes? Decidedly she was not Dr. Ward's governess. She had seemed to imply she was in the scholastic profession. Douglas ran over in his mind all the families resident in Templehurst, but he could think of none likely to boast of a governess.

"I wish you had been home," said Mrs. Ward, three days later. "Lady Cameron came to ask us all to go to a large party on Christmas Eve. I didn't know what in the world to say for you, so I accepted."

"Who is going?"

"Everyone. It is a regular institution here. Every Christmas Eve there is a party at Cameron Hall. Every family in the neighbourhood who ever visits the Camerons receive an invite from Lady Marsden to poor Mrs. Brown, the half-blind widow of the old vicar. The children go, too—all over five years old. It is the nicest gathering you can think of. High tea at six; then games and music till half-past nine. The children and the old people disappear then. They have supper and go home, and there is dancing for all who care to stay till twelve, when supper is served in the old hall. A Christmas carol is sung and all disperse. I have never missed one of Lady Cameron's Christmas parties since we came to Templehurst."

"Her parties are always charming, but I never happened to be in the way at Christmas time. What a nice woman she is!"

"And what a pity she has no children!"

"Aye," said the young doctor, gravely, "I suppose there is a thorn in every lot, and that is hers."

"Well, did I do right to accept for you?"

"Certainly. I would not stay away on any account."

For Douglas said to himself, surely at Lady Cameron's Christmas parties he must meet the girl whose blue eyes haunted him as no woman's face had ever done before.

"Of course she will be there," he muttered to himself as he dressed for the party, "and I shall know at last what to call her. It is provoking to have to think of her without a name."

Fortune did not favour Douglas. He was called to an old woman in the village just as he was setting out, and this delayed him so that it was past seven when he reached the Hall. He was shown into the drawing-room, but Lady Cameron was not there. The beautiful old room was peopled chiefly by the very smallest of the guests—half-a-dozen children too tiny to mix in the games of their elder brothers and sisters; but Douglas felt no disappointment at the absence of his hostess, for directing the sports of the Lilliputian party was Miss Black, and at her side the girl in whose company he had travelled from London nine days ago.

He noticed even then that she (already it was she with Douglas) had captured all the children's hearts. She was sitting in the most undignified fashion on the hearthrug with a mitre of three perched on her shoulder. A tress of her golden hair had escaped its coils, and fell below her waist, and her dress of unpretending muslin showed the whiteness of her rounded arms.

Douglas forgot Miss Black—he forgot everything but his princess. He went up to her, and took her hand. Pamela Black, who had all a true woman's affection for romance, scented a love story at once, and retired to a remote corner of the room with as many children as would follow her.

"I think we hardly need an introduction!"

"No, indeed," said Linda, blushing rosy red. "I shall never forget your kindness to me, Mr. Anstruther. Uncle says you saved my life. He wanted to go and thank you, but I knew you would be here to-night, and I wanted to do my thanking myself."

"There is no need—and you really were not hurt."

"I was stunned at first, and one of my arms was bruised, but—think what it might have been if you had not been there!"

He smiled; Linda's gratitude was so naive and touching.

"It was a sad introduction to your return to Templehurst." Then abruptly, "Do they make you comfortable?"

Linda thought men used strange words; but, perhaps, from having spoken a foreign language so much for the last few years the word comfortable hardly struck her as much as it would have done another girl.

"Uncle and aunt—they are kindness itself!"

Mr. Anstruther started.

"I thought you were a governess!"

"Did you? I am afraid I should spoil the children too much. I never could say, 'No, dear, it isn't good for you.'"

Still no suspicion of the truth came to him.

"And you are staying here?"

"Yes. I am to stay at Cameron Hall until I come of age. Dear old place! I should like to stay here always."

"Can't you?"

She shook her head.

"I have a home of my own, and some day, when I have grown older and wiser, I must go and live there."

"You don't seem fond of it."

"How can I be? I never was there in my life. Oakdene is nothing but an empty name to me."

Oakdene! The veins in his forehead stood out like thick purple cords; without thinking of Linda's bewilderment he turned on his heels and left her. He could not continue the conversation—he could not speak another word; the wound was all too keen. This girl whom he had loved at first sight, whom he had taken for a little, lonely governess, was the heiress of an untold wealth, and—the mistress of his ancestral home.

She would rule where he had thought to be master—all that had been his birthright was hers.

The only woman who had ever charmed his fancy, the only creature he had desired for his own, was his enemy's daughter—Linda Vane.

It was a bitter night, but Douglas felt neither frost nor wind. He paced the terrace for full an hour, and in that lonely walk he shaped his future course.

"She need never know. Even if she were not his child her wealth would be barrier enough between us. I can meet her with the courtesy due to a woman, and to one of Lady Cameron's guests—the rest I shall forget."

Forget! And he came of a race loyal to their last breath, faithful while life lasted. The race from Douglas sprang from had made it their boast that the Anstruthers were "not good at forgetting."

"I have just seen your ward," said Douglas, with well-feigned indifference, when he met Lady Cameron five minutes after his return to the house.

"Have you—she is very charming, is she not?"

"She is not the least like her father—in looks."

"She is her mother in face and mind. Douglas, for your sake, I would gladly have avoided this meeting, but it was beyond me."

"What does it matter?" said Mr. Anstruther, with admirable calm. "I don't suppose she has ever heard my name in connection with her father."

"She knows nothing of that miserable business—nothing in the world."

"Just so. Then my name can have no painful associations for Miss Vane."

"I was not thinking of Linda."

"Of whom, then?"

"You."

"Lady Cameron, I am not worth a regret from you; besides, I do not regret this meeting. I have often wondered into whose hands my old home would fall. I know at least that Oakdene will have a beautiful mistress."

"I am so glad you take it like this."

He laughed a little bitterly.

"Did you expect me to walk out of the house directly the young lady was made known to me, or that I should denounce her publicly as the child of a felon—he was a felon at heart! No, dear Lady Cameron, those are not nineteenth-century manners."

Kate felt uneasy, and was glad to pass on and leave him. The little ones were going, and she found Linda busy helping a long array of nurses to wrap them up. Linda looked flushed, but Lady Cameron thought there was a shadow over the sweet face.

"Are you enjoying yourself, darling?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I thought you looked tired."

"I have done such a stupid thing. I wanted to thank Mr. Anstruther for his kindness the other day, and I suppose I worded my gratitude wrongly, for he looked as if he could have killed me, and rushed out of the room."

"Linda!"

"He did, aunty. Miss Black was there, and saw him; she said perhaps he had toothache."

"Perhaps he has," said Lady Cameron, weakly catching up the notion; "but, Linda, did you say anything that could offend him?"

"I didn't mean to."

"Think."

"He was asking me if I lived here, and I told him yes, but my home was at Oakdene. It was after that he left me. Perhaps he thought I meant to let him know I was an heiress."

"He is very peculiar."

"Is he? I thought you liked him!"

Lady Cameron was in a dilemma; for Linda's own sake the truth must not be told, and how to invent any plausible explanation she could not think.

"I do like him very much, but I never thought he got on with young ladies. I think, dear, I should avoid him as much as possible."

"Very well," said Miss Vane, in a hurt voice; "only, aunty, when a man saves your life it's rather strange to show your gratitude by avoiding him as much as possible."

Mr. Anstruther walked home from the Hall



with Mrs. Ward, whose one theme of conversation was the heiress.

"She is the sweetest girl I ever saw. The children are in love with her. I should never have taken her to be so."

"Why not?"

"She is not the least stuck-up. I think I never saw anyone I liked so much at first sight. She has promised often to come and see us and play with the children."

Mr. Anstruther went to church on Christmas Day, but the old wrong rankled in his heart. He loved Linda Vane, but he could not forgive her for being her father's daughter, and her fortune in itself would have been enough to separate them.

But walking in the village in the afternoon with Dr. Ward they came on Sir Henry and Miss Vane. The Baronet, who had none of his wife's tact, knowing he wanted to consult the elder doctor on some sanitary question, calmly tucked his arm in his, and carried him off. The street was only broad enough for two; Linda and Douglas were obliged to fall behind, and follow their seniors together.

"I am so sorry."

They were her first words. She looked just as she did when he saw her first, even to the sealskin coat and felt hat. Douglas almost forgot her parentage.

"For what, Miss Vane?"

"That I have vexed you. I must have said something very rude last night to make you leave me so suddenly, but the fact is I have been abroad so many years. I often make little mistakes in my English, and make things sound quite different to my meaning."

"I am quite sure you never vexed me," he said, quickly. "I was abominably rude, but—"

He stopped, almost as embarrassed as Lady Cameron the night before.

"Miss Black thought you had the toothache," said Linda, "and that it came on then with a twinge."

"That was it; a sudden pain. I could not command myself. I ought to have apologized to you before."

"Oh, no! But I am so sorry."

"You had a merry gathering last night?"

"Very. I think Aunt Kate's parties always go off well. She makes everyone feel at home."

"Especially those who have no home."

"Haven't you a home?"

She had no sooner spoken than she recollected herself, and added, quickly,—

"Please forgive me. I am always saying rude things, you see."

He smiled. It was impossible to be angry with Linda.

"I have no home," he answered, sadly, "though I cannot think how you guessed it."

"I thought you were like me."

"Like you?"

"Yes," went on Linda, dreamily. "You live with the Wards, but you don't belong to them. I live at the Hall, and Lady Cameron is very good to me, but you know really I haven't the least bit of claim on her, and I think sometimes I must be a great nuisance to her and her husband. It can't be nice to have a girl foisted on you for years whether you like it or not."

"I don't think you will stay years at Cameron Hall, Miss Vane."

"I must. It is in my father's will that I should live with my guardian till I come of age."

"You may have chosen another guardian long before that."

"I couldn't. No one would be so nice as Sir Henry."

"But if you married?"

"Married!" the girl's face softened strangely. "I don't think I shall ever do that."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, only I never picture myself married. I am very fond of day dreams, but I never think of myself as anything but Linda Vane."

"And what are your day-dreams? Do you mean to live at Oakdene, and keep a great deal of company?"

"I don't think I shall ever live at Oakdene."

"Why not? Isn't it a nice place?"

"It is very beautiful, I believe. I will show you a picture of it some day, but I have very painful recollections of it."

"I thought you had never been there."

"No. I have never been there. You will think me foolish, but I have a kind of superstitious dread of Oakdene."

"Why?"

"I can hardly explain it, only I loved my mother. You see my father was always busy. I don't remember him in the least, but my mother I shall never forget. People say she was like me, but that is all nonsense; she had the sweetest, loveliest face I ever saw, and she was so gentle. I was very little at the time, not more than five I daresay, but looking back I can remember that she had no regular illness; she was never in bed; she only grew thinner and thinner every day, till at last one morning they told me I had no mamma."

Linda stopped with a sort of choked sob.

"Afterwards I heard the servants talking, and they said Oakdene had killed her. Within a year my father died, too, and I went to school. I don't remember papa's death or anything, only I know when people congratulate me on being mistress of Oakdene I long to tell them I hate the place that killed my mother, and I often think I would give up everything I have, and earn my living just like Miss Black, if only it could give me my mother."

Douglas was touched.

"You don't know the value of your honours, Miss Vane," he said, kindly. "The world will soon teach you better."

"I don't think so."

"And so you hate Oakdene? Some people have loved it well."

"Have they? I don't think I ever shall."

"And in your day-dreams where are you if not at Oakdene?"

"Oh! I am in London; I am quite sure I shall not be rich always. I often seem to see myself quite poor."

"You can't be poor, Miss Vane, while you have Oakdene; its revenues are counted by thousands."

"Are they? Have you ever seen the place, as you seem to know it so well?"

"When I was a boy I often spent my holidays there."

"Did you—with my father?"

"No, it was not his then."

"And was it a nice place?"

"A beautiful one."

"And what was there dreary or gloomy about it? What could the tenants mean when they said Oakdene killed my mother?"

He knew, but from his heart he prayed the knowledge might be spared her.

"I would not think of that, Miss Vane," and he almost marvelled at himself as he made the proposal. "You said just now we were alive; at least we have shared a common peril, and we are both without any very close home ties. Do you think we might be friends?"

"I should like it of all things; friends are better than relations, because we choose them for ourselves. Oh, yes, Mr. Anstruther, we will be friends!"

She put out her little hand in its dainty, grey-kid glove, and Douglas clasped it warmly. She was his enemy's daughter, the usurper of his birthright, but she had no hand in the wrong done him. His love she must never be, but surely no human law could prevent their being friends.

Of course she would marry soon and settle down in her rôle as a great county lady; the village surgeon would be forgotten then. Their intimacy at best could be but a brief and fleeting one, but for the time they both spent in pretty, sleepy Templehurst surely they might be friends!

Douglas saw no danger to either in the arrangement. He was a clever, thoughtful man, but it never dawned on him the compact just made was one well-nigh impossible to fulfil—that the friendship, if warm enough to merit the name, might drift into something else. He knew he had been within an ace of falling in love with Linda, but

he deemed the peril over, and would have been very indignant if anyone had told him it was a case not of falling, but of having fallen. He was a great admirer of Lord Byron, and yet, on this bright winter's day, he never recalled the lines of that world-famed poet, which might have warned him,—

"I free from passion, which all friendship smothereth  
And your true feeling known and understood,  
No friend like to a woman earth discovers  
So that you have not been—nor shall be—lovers."

### CHAPTER III.

LINDA VANE went home on that Christmas afternoon with a strange, new gladness at her heart. She could not have told why the world seemed so fair to her, she did not even realise herself how much she prized Douglas Anstruther's promised friendship. Linda was too young to understand the crisis of her life had come, and that, all unwittingly, her heart had slipped out of her own keeping.

She found Lady Cameron in her boudoir. She smiled at Linda's happy face.

"Your walk has done you good; where did you go, child—through the village?"

"Yes; we met Dr. Ward and Mr. Anstruther; they walked with us up the Templehurst Hill."

"Isn't the doctor nice?"

"I didn't have much chance of finding out; uncle absorbed him completely. I think they were discussing public baths and drainage."

Lady Cameron looked surprised.

"Then you were left to Mr. Anstruther?"

"Yes; do you know, Aunt Kate, Miss Black was quite right about the toothache? I told Mr. Anstruther she thought it was that made him leave us so suddenly last night, and he said yes, a sudden pain seized him."

"Then I suppose you have forgiven him?"

"There was nothing to forgive. We have agreed to be great friends, Aunt Kate; and only think, he knows Oakdene so well, he used to spend his holidays there when he was a boy."

Lady Cameron felt bewildered.

"Linda," she said, gently, "I have known Douglas Anstruther a great many years, and I have heard the story of his life. Don't talk to him about Oakdene, child; the subject is a painful one to him."

"It didn't seem so."

"The place is mixed up with the saddest part of his life, child. Take my advice, talk to Douglas Anstruther of anything rather than your home."

A little sobered, and very much surprised, Linda was turning to leave when Sir Henry entered, a small velvet casket in his hands.

"I am a very forgetful guardian, Linda, I was to give you this directly after your nineteenth birthday, and here are ten days slipped by."

"What is it?"

"Your mother's jewels. When she knew she was dying she sent them to me with a request I would take care of them for you."

"But—my father—"

"Yes, he was alive then, but he was a busy man. Perhaps she thought he would overlook the charge, perhaps she fancied another wife and other children would make him forgetful of his first-born. I cannot explain it to you otherwise; I only know this casket has been in my strong-box all these years, and I have never even glanced at the contents."

"Linda shall inspect them to-night in her own room," said Lady Cameron, kindly. "She will like to be alone when she sees her mother's jewels."

It was just what Linda wished. They spent a very quiet, happy evening, and, somehow, it seemed quite natural that Mr. Anstruther should drop in after dinner and make a fourth in the little circle.

"Well," said Lady Cameron, inquiringly, when they happened to be alone for a moment.

"What does that monosyllable mean?"

"It asks a question. Have you forgiven her?"

"Whom?"

"You know."

"I change my question, then, and say for what?"

"Her parentage."

"I think she is all that is pure and true, and I hope you will find her a husband worthy of her."

"Oh! Perhaps you have a friend you could suggest for the post? Naturally you are anxious for the poor child to marry; she would then be far removed from Templehurst—and you."

"You are unjust."

"Don't let us quarrel. See, here comes Linda; the child looks happy, doesn't she?"

They broke up early. It was but little after eleven when Linda Vane sat down by the fire in her own room, the velvet cushion on a little table near her—her maid had been dismissed. Her beautiful hair fell round her like a golden veil; her slender form was wrapped in a dressing-gown of sky-blue cashmere. Very thoughtful and subdued was the fair face to-night. As she had told Mr. Anstruther, Linda remembered her mother perfectly. She had loved her with a child's passionate fervour, and she could not open the little casket without a strange yearning for the mother she had so worshipped.

The key turned slowly in the lock, the casket was open. Truly the gems were rare—a suite of pearls of wonderful size and purity, a locket set with diamonds, rings, brooches, trinkets of all descriptions, mostly of great value, and at the bottom of the casket, well-nigh hidden by its brilliant contents, a folded paper, sealed with red wax, and bearing this inscription:—

"To my daughter, Linda, should she remain the heiress of Oakdene—otherwise to be destroyed unread."

Linda understood. Her mother, knowing her husband's ambition, had fancied he might contract a second marriage and obtain the son so ardently desired. This letter, of course, was some farewell wish about the beautiful home she had never ruled at—some wish that could only take effect if her own child inherited the property. Thus far Linda saw nothing strange or unnatural in her discovery, and yet her fingers trembled as she broke the seal.—

"MY MUCH-LOVED CHILD,—

"You will read this letter only if you are your father's heiress, and I feel a dim presentiment that this misfortune threatens you. He loves me so intensely I cannot believe he would ever put another in my place or give my child rivals in his heart, and so my Linda—my little girl whom I have so loved—I write to warn you solemnly of your duty.

"You are so young now, darling, you can't understand, and later on you will be so rich no one will tell you. You must not reproach your father, dear. If he sinned it was for love of us; but, child, never rule as mistress of Oakdene; never take that property as your own, or a curse will rest on you for ever.

"Linda, Oakdene never should have been ours. It is the true and lawful property of the Anstruthers. Claude Anstruther and your father were partners. The alliance brought one ruin, the other wealth. This has caused my death, dear, the knowing that we were living on ill-gotten gains, that our whole fortune belonged rightly to the Anstruthers. When I think of that grand old family exiled from their rightful home, when I feel that we whom they befriended have caused their ruin, my heart aches with such bitter pain I can welcome death gladly. I have spoken to your father, but in vain. He bids me think of my child. I do think of her, and I conjure her with my dying breath to make restoration. Linda, something tells me your father will not linger long after me, and that you will come to your inheritance early. I know my husband meant you to be of age at eighteen. I was eighteen when you were born. Full power will be in your hands then. Put no faith in Hill and Leslin, your father's lawyers, but judge for yourself, and yourself alone. If you need legal help go to Mr. Dyason, of the Inner Temple. He used to be our greatest

friend. The day your father purchased Oakdene he cut him publicly in the street. My darling, this restoration may make you poor enough in this world's goods, but at least you will have peace. No thought of others' ruin will be at your door to trouble your last hours as it has done mine. They will call my illness by many learned names, dear, but remember always one thing, and one only, killed me—Oakdene."

The wax candles were expiring in their sockets when Linda put down her mother's letter. She felt as though joy, happiness, and peace had left her for ever. Never more could she hold up her head. It seemed to her the weight of shame and remorse must crush her to the ground.

No wonder Mr. Anstruther had started when he heard her name; no wonder he had rushed from the presence of Linda Vane, of Oakdene. Oh! how he must despise her! Oh! how her careless words spoken only this afternoon must have tortured him! Oh! was there any creature in the world so miserable as she!

He was here toiling as an underpaid assistant-surgeon, and she—child of the man who had befriended him—was the great heiress of the place.

Linda shed bitter tears of shame at the thought.

Restitution! Of course it should be made. If she had to give up every farthing she possessed and go out into the world like Miss Black, she would go sooner than Douglas Anstruther should suffer further wrong from her.

She was glad she was not to go to Messrs. Hill and Leslin, the lawyers who had charge of her property. They were self-made, skilful men of business, but Linda had never liked them. She must put a few questions to Sir Henry Cameron about her father's will. Then she would go to London and see Mr. Dyason.

"Linda, what is the matter?"

Lady Cameron might well ask. She was terrified when she saw Linda at breakfast the next day. The girl was white as sculptured marble. There were purple rings under her eyes—the eyes themselves were swollen with crying. She looked as if she had been ill for weeks.

"I think I sat up too late."

"You have been fretting."

"I couldn't help it," said Linda, gladly accepting this view of the case. "You see, I remember mamma so well, and the jewels brought it all back to me."

"Well, you must cheer up. Your uncle has gone out shooting. I don't know what he would say to say to such an altered Linda."

At first Miss Vane regretted her guardian's absence, but she knew Lady Cameron shared all his secrets, and bethought herself it would be easier to extract information from her.

"Aunt Kate," she said, suddenly "do you remember my mother?"

"Perfectly. I never knew her as intimately as I wished. She was very quiet and retiring, but I loved her dearly."

"What did she die of?"

There were few questions that could have been so unwelcome to Lady Cameron.

"What put that into your mind, Linda?"

"I was thinking. I know she just faded away, but I never heard any name given to her illness."

"The doctors called it consumption. You need not be afraid, darling, though you are her very image. Everyone said the disease was not in the family. There is no chance of its being hereditary."

"I am not afraid. How strange it all seems! I had a little brother once. I wish he had lived."

"Then you would not be an heiress?"

"No. Aunt Kate, is it really true I was to come of age on my eighteenth birthday?"

"As far as money matters were concerned your father made a most peculiar will. On your eighteenth birthday you were to come into full possession of your fortune, with the power to dispose of it by will; but you were to reside with us, and not to marry without my husband's consent until you were one-and-twenty."

"I see."

"In fact," went on Lady Cameron, "your father took more care of you than of your property. If you liked to give Oakdene to the lunacy commissioners tomorrow for a new asylum he couldn't prevent you; but for three years you can't choose a husband unless we approve of him. I think your income is twenty five thousand a year. I'm not quite sure, for it has been accumulating at interest and compound interest ever since your father died—and it is none of it settled on you, except the little dower which comes to you from your mother. It has often struck people as odd that the heiress of such enormous wealth should hitherto have had such a small allowance. Sir Henry is going to get you a cheque-book and open an account for you at the bank. You may spend seventy pounds a day, I believe, and yet have no fear of being ruined. Messrs. Hill and Leslin have managed very well for you, and I think things had better be in their hands still till you come of age and set up a grand home of your own."

"I always thought papa was a poor man!"

"He began life as a clerk at a hundred a year. He was very clever in business matters."

Linda had got all she wanted. She tried hard to rally her spirits and seem as usual, but it was beyond her, and directly after lunch she was forced to retire to her own room and lie down.

"Won't you dress for dinner, miss?" asked her maid, coming in about six with a cup of tea. "The master has come home and brought Mr. Anstruther."

Meet Douglas Anstruther! Meet the man her father had defrauded! Linda's cheeks tingled at the thought, but she only said, slowly,—

"I think not, Mary."

"Is your head no better, miss?"

"No, it aches and aches. I think I am best up here."

She thought a good deal of her own history that night, and the hope came to her with a strong conviction that her father had repented his cruel fraud. His will, she knew, had been made just before his death, and by it she was prevented using any portion of his fortune until she came of age. He had fixed eighteen as her majority, that she might decide her course before she was fettered by love or marriage. The more she pondered over it the more certain she felt her father knew of her mother's letter, and had so arranged his affairs that she was free to make restitution if she would.

"I shall have his sanction," thought Linda.

"He cannot tell me, but I shall feel he knows."

She was downstairs very early the next day dressed in her grey dress and long sealakin coat.

"I'm going out," she told the old butler, gravely. "Simmonds, I shall not be home to lunch."

Simmonds started; that Mary had taken her young lady's breakfast upstairs he knew, but that Miss Linda, who yesterday had been confined to her own room with headache, should now be tramping off by herself no one knew where, at eight o'clock in the morning, did seem to him a trifle strange; but Linda smiled on him and conquered any scruples he might have felt. It is some people's birthright to win servants' hearts, and it was Linda's.

She walked briskly down the village, got to the station in good time, and ensconced herself very comfortably in a first-class carriage. The express train got to London in two hours and a-half, so Linda found herself in the Temple before twelve, and only then did her heart sink at the thought of the task which lay before her.

She might find Mr. Dyason had died, he might be gone away; worse than all, he might refuse to see her, as the child of the man he had despised—that was the worst of all. Linda resolved promptly she would not send in her name; at least she would spare herself a point-blank denial.

It was a relief to find the lawyer's name, at any rate, remained in its old place. Linda found a brass-plate inscribed "Dyason and Carlyle," which was a very welcome sight, and she rang



at the bell, with the sensation she was progressing.

"Can I see Mr. Dyason?"

An ancient clerk surveyed her attentively. Linda's pretty face was certainly a novelty in the Inner Temple.

"Have you an appointment, miss?"

"No," returned Linda; "but I have come up from the country on business of the greatest importance. I must see Mr. Dyason this morning."

Perhaps the "must" was effectual; perhaps the pretty face was powerful; perhaps the clerk reflected that the second morning after Christmas Day is not a very busy occasion, and that his master had really only come to town to open his letters. Anyway, he placed Linda a chair, and went to the head partner's private room.

"A young lady is asking to see you, sir."

"A young lady. Who is it, White?"

"I don't know, sir; someone of importance, I should say. She has come up from the country on urgent business."

"Not collecting cards or begging-petitions, White? You know there are shoals of them about at this time of the year, and I don't want to be disturbed unless it's urgent."

"I think it is important, sir; she's too young for the collecting-cards, I think."

"Show her in."

Linda saw a man of sixty or sixty-five, with a shrewd, intelligent face, and thoughtful grey eyes; his hair was perfectly white, but his form upright as a lath. Only to look at him you knew he was a gentleman in thought and feeling. He glanced at Linda, and then he started.

"I ought to know you," he said, pleasantly. "I am quite sure I know your face, but I can't recall your name."

Linda half trembled.

"You are in trouble!" said Mr. Dyason, quickly. "You look over young to have to do with law. Had you no relations to come here instead of you?"

"No, Mr. Dyason, my mother directed me to come to you; you will not refuse to help me."

"I never refused to help anyone in trouble yet. Sit down and tell me what I can do for you."

"I am Linda Vane."

She knew by the change in his face that he remembered her father's story, and in perfect silence she handed him her mother's letter.

You might have heard a pin drop while he read it; then he folded it slowly, and returned it to her.

"Well!"

"I want you to help me, sir."

"To do what?"

She never flinched.

"To restore Oakdene and its revenues to Mr. Anstruther."

Mr. Dyason watched her carefully.

"I suppose you are turned eighteen?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you have made up your mind?"

"Quite."

"Do you know that it will take half your property?"

"I daresay."

"You talk of restitution, but you are in no wise bound to make it. Oakdene is yours in the eyes of the law. You were a child when the transaction took place, and even then those most interested confessed they could bring no legal complaint against your father."

Linda's eyes filled.

"Won't you help me?"

"You are such a child. You may be regretting it before you are a year older."

"Did you read that letter?"

"Yes."

"Then do you think I can regret anything that saves me from what killed my mother?"

"Hem! Twenty years ago Claude Anstruther possessed Oakdene and ten thousand a year, while his share in the business was worth another fifty thousand, if you admit he was deprived of these by your father's agency when the crash came, five years later, you have to remember this fortune has been alienated for fifteen years,

You would have to restore two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, with interest and compound interest. That would make a hole even in such a fortune as yours!"

"I don't care."

"Hill and Leslie are your father's lawyers, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"What will they say to it?"

"I don't care. Mr. Dyason, won't you understand I want to clear my father's name. I want to be able to hold up my head and look the whole world in the face."

"You know your father was made bankrupt?"

"No."

"The firm failed for fifty thousand pounds. Mr. Anstruther paid his share—ruined himself to do it. Your father grew rich again, and never cared for his creditors. If you refund a princely fortune to Douglas Anstruther these people will have a right to feel themselves injured."

"They must be paid."

"Do you know what this will leave you?"

"I don't care"—her face was working painfully—"I have had a good education. I can earn my living as a governess."

"It won't be so bad as that—you will have the two hundred a-year that was your mother's dower. Nothing can deprive you of that; but, Miss Vane, there is a vast difference between Oakdene and twenty-five thousand a year and nowhere and two hundred."

Linda nodded her head.

"You are getting near now," she said, in her sweet, frank manner. "I am sure you are going to help me."

"Help you to beggar yourself? That's what it amounts to, you know."

"Can we do it quickly?"

"How impatient you are; but, Miss Vane, Douglas Anstruther is as proud as you are. I doubt if he will accept your generosity."

"He must."

"He is very proud. It must be done by deed of gift, settling Oakdene and the money on him and his heirs for ever. Yes, that will do. He can't set it aside then, for he is sure to marry some day for the sake of his name."

Linda's heart sank. She could bear to be penniless, and yet she felt she could not bear to see Douglas Anstruther with a wife at his side.

"Miss Vane," said the old lawyer, gravely, "this ought not to be done hurriedly. I assure you no such sacrifice is binding on you. Take time to think over it."

Linda shook her head.

"I don't want to think any longer. I know I mean what I say. Every day I delay I shall feel I am disobeying my mother."

"And don't you think of your mother's child?"

It was quite dark when a small figure entered the avenue of Cameron Hall. Sir Henry and his wife came out to meet her full of alarm. They led her into the drawing-room, and there by the light of the lamp they saw the pretty face had recovered its serenity. All the tear stains, the sadness of yesterday had disappeared. It was their own bright-eyed Linda once again.

"Where have you been?" cried Lady Cameron, in a voice which had a strange kind of sob in it, for, however much she might try to disguise the fact, she loved Linda very dearly. "You naughty child, you have scared us to death."

"It has done her good, wherever it was," said Sir Henry, kindly. "Now, Linda, confess your sin."

"I have been to London."

"To London?"

"Yes"—she felt it must be known, and the sooner the better—"and please I'm not an heiress any longer."

"Linda!"

"I know all," she said, simply. "There was a letter from my mother in that jewel-box telling me, and so I went to London to-day to see Mr. Dyason."

It flashed upon husband and wife that Dyason

and Carlyle had been the solicitors to the Anstruthers.

"It is all quite right," said Linda, dreamily. "He says there is quite money enough. Mr. Anstruther will be master of Oakdene and have back all he lost through us, and all the creditors will be paid in full."

"And you?"

"Oh, I shall have my mother's fortune."

"Two hundred a year?"

"It will be quite enough, and if I am too poor for you to let me stay here I'll go to London and be a hospital nurse. It is all quite right, but oh! I feel so strange. Is the room turning round, or am I only giddy?"

And then without another word Linda fainted away.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"NOTHING could induce me to take it. I should not think of such a thing."

The speaker, of course, was Douglas Anstruther. The time was just four days after Miss Vane's interview with Mr. Dyason. The young doctor had been summoned to London by a mysteriously vague telegram, and had arrived to find the deed signed and sealed which restored to him all, more than all, he had once deemed his birthright.

"You must," said Mr. Dyason, rather though he rejoiced at the compulsion. "You can't help yourself."

"I can refuse to have anything to do with it."

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Because you have only a life interest in the matter. This deed"—touching it—"conveys estate and money to you and your heirs for ever. Those words 'and your heirs' put it out of your power to undo my client's work, I fancy."

Douglas groaned.

"Have you seen her?" he asked, suddenly. "Do you know what kind of creature you have allowed to strip herself of everything for a mere chimera? She is the prettiest, most innocent child. I don't suppose she ever realises what it means to be poor."

"I have seen her."

"Well."

"And I admit that she is charming, but I don't fancy, Mr. Anstruther, she will ever need to realise what it means to be poor."

"Why not?"

"She is sure to marry, and to marry young. Men don't expect a dower with a face like hers."

"Sell herself to the highest bidder," muttered Douglas. "I don't think she'll do that."

"There are such things," said the lawyer, dryly, "as marriages of affection."

"Are there?"

"I wonder you never thought of marrying Miss Vane yourself."

"I had not an idea you had allowed her to beggar herself until I came here."

"You might give her back Oakdene and the larger half of her fortune. I think it would be a most suitable arrangement."

"Do you? I hate suitable arrangements."

"You are very unforgiving. I thought that now at least you might have forgiven her for being her father's child."

"I can't forgive myself for robbing her, and I can't forgive you for bringing me into the scrape."

"Well, she is sure to marry, and, Douglas Anstruther, let me tell you her husband will get a treasure. I wonder who he will be?"

"You speak as if he were fixed on already."

"I believe he is."

"What makes you think so?"

Mr. Dyason hesitated.

"I insist on knowing," said Douglas, hotly.

"I may be mistaken, only when this deed was in contemplation I suggested there might come a time when she had other claims on her. Miss Vane blushed so deeply I thought the time could not be far off."

"Mr. Dyason, are you sure this mad act cannot be undone?"

"Certain!"

"Nothing can restore Oakdene to Miss Vane!"

"Nothing but your marrying her."

"Then I can't help wronging her!"

"You won't need to be troubled with the thought of it. Of course, you'll throw up your profession and settle at Oakdene, and then, in all probability, you'll never cross each other's path again."

But this did not strike Mr. Anstruther as a particularly pleasing solution of the difficulty.

He was so cross that, whereas he had told Mrs. Ward he should remain that night in town, he went straight back to Templehurst, and reached Hope Lodge about five o'clock.

He met the children and Miss Black out walking.

He knew that Mrs. Ward was keeping her room with a sick headache, so he expected to find the drawing-room deserted, and went into it to warm himself at the ruddy fire.

Maudie Ward lay asleep in an easy-chair. She had not been very well, and had stayed at home when the others went out.

Douglas watched the pretty child's face gravely, then, believing himself alone, he half-muttered one word,—

"Scarlatina."

"Are you sure?"

He looked up; sitting close to the sleeping child, half hidden by the little one, was Linda.

Strange, that all the way from town he had been picturing their meeting, and wondering what to say to her, and now it should come about in this commonplace fashion.

"I feel certain!" he said, his own interests buried in those of the doctor at once. "You ought to go home at once; you may take the infection."

"I have taken it, if I am going to. I shall stay here."

"You shall not!"

"Listen," said Linda, gently; "I must! There is Miss Black due at her post in a large boys' school next month; she would lose her living if she took the disease; Mrs. Ward is too delicate to undertake the nursing alone. I shall stay here, and Miss Black will take the children to the Hall."

"And what will Lady Cameron say?"

"There she is, ask her;" for a carriage had come cantering down the road, and was stopping before the doctor's.

At that very moment Dr. Ward came from another way.

He and Lady Cameron met upon the doorstep.

"Don't bring her in!" was Anstruther's greeting, as he hurried out to prevent the doctor unbarbering in his guest.

The door, thanks to his latch-key, was already open.

"Now, you mustn't be alarmed, but I am sure Maudie has the scarlet fever."

The father's face grew pale, Lady Cameron's voice shook,—

"But Linda! Is she here?"

"She tells me she means to remain and share the nursing. Whatever risk there is she has already run."

There was a hurried consultation. Dr. and Mrs. Ward protested against Linda's sacrificing herself, but Lady Cameron read in the doctor's face the comfort her presence would be; and looking at Mrs. Ward's delicate features, and knowing how very soon another little life was expected at Hope Lodge she could not grudge the troubled household her darling.

"I shall take Miss Black and the children to the Hall. Here they come. I will wait in the carriage while you bundle them up some clothes, and I will leave you Linda. Douglas, will you take care of her? Remember, we love her dearly, and can ill spare her from our home."

"I will remember."

The Wards knew nothing of the strange good fortune that had befallen Mr. Anstruther. They had never heard the link that connected his past with Miss Vane's. They were grateful from their hearts to Linda.

Maudie loved her dearly, and she had the gift which is nature's own, and never acquired, of nursing. She was ten times as valuable as poor

Miss Black with the best intention could have been.

"You have got your wish."

This was his greeting to Linda when Douglas entered the sick room an hour later, and found Maudie in bed, and Miss Vane in her soft grey dress in charge of the invalid.

"I think you always do."

She looked at him, and he at her. A strange light shone in her eyes.

"Have you forgiven me?"

"For what?"

"Being my father's daughter. Oh, Mr. Anstruther! I must have seemed cruel and heartless to you on Christmas Day; but I knew nothing then—nothing in the world!"

"I was sure of that. And so they have let you ruin yourself for a mere chimera?"

"I was so glad to do it! Mr. Anstruther, I am sure he wished it at the last. It is just as though I had done it for him."

"If I could have found a way of undoing your work it should not stand," said Douglas, solemnly; "but you have been too clever for me!"

"But this does not change things, does it?" said Linda wistfully, "You don't take back your promise—we are friends still!"

And his next words, though spoken in a tone of deep feeling, almost took all joy from her heart, all colour from her cheek.

"I think not, Miss Vane; I fear that compact of ours was a great mistake."

"A mistake!"

"You and I can never be friends; it is an impossibility. I was mad to think of such a thing."

With a look in her blue eyes that smote him to the heart Linda turned away to her little patient. Through all the days that followed she never spoke an unnecessary word to Mr. Anstruther. They were doctor and nurse—nothing more.

Maudie did not die. There were two or three times when she was in danger, and one night in particular, when Douglas thought the morning would find her gone; but she rallied again with the elasticity of childhood, and when the New Year was six days old she was pronounced convalescent, and even allowed to be wrapped in her little dressing-gown and carried to another room.

They made a little festival of the event. Douglas Anstruther, ever a children's slave, and her parents came to have tea in the pretty little sitting-room where Maudie had been carried.

Lady Cameron, who was having another juvenile party at the Hall, sent a realiced Twelfth cake and a goodly parcel of "characters" to amuse the small invalid, and so, after all, Maudie had her share of the season's merry-making.

Dr. Ward was summoned to a patient; his wife fell placidly asleep in her easy-chair. Maudie was perfectly absorbed in the delights of inspecting the "characters," which, though the little company numbered only four, she fully intended should be "drawn" presently; and so, to all intents and purposes, Douglas Anstruther was alone with his enemy's daughter.

"When are you going home?"

It was the first time she had addressed to him any but the most necessary, commonplace remarks since the moment when he told her their compact was absurd, and friendship between them impossible. The blue eyes were fixed steadily on his face as she asked her question.

"Home! Where is home?"

"Oakdene."

"Never, I think."

"I thought you loved the place!"

"I should find it peopled with ghosts—ghosts of the past; besides it is too large a house for a single man. I shall never live at Oakdene until I can take my wife there."

"Your wife!"

"Why should I not marry?" he cried, a little impatiently. "I am not an old man; even you, Miss Vane, cannot call me venerable."

"Of course not. Is—the wedding to be soon?"

"Never, I think."

Linda looked bewildered.

"I cannot understand you," she said, simply. "You seem to have but one word at your disposal. Whatever I ask you you answer."

"Never."

Douglas looked at her strangely.

"I may have set my affection on one particular face, so that no other has any charm for me. I told you the answer as I feared it would be the truth. Had I consulted my own wishes, I should have said to-morrow."

"You could not be married to-morrow," objected Miss Vane, "unless the arrangements are made already."

"How matter-of-fact you are!"

"Well, you won't be tried by my society much longer. Very soon Maudie can spare me; then I am going to London for a week's quarantine before I go back to Cameron Hall."

"Why don't you call it home?"

"I don't know," half dreamily; "I don't think it is my home really."

"Your day-dreams have come true in part," said Mr. Anstruther. "You said you could never picture yourself living at Oakdene."

"Ah, I am free to please myself now! The career that would have been Utopian for the heiress of Oakdene will be suitable enough for Miss Vane, of nowhere in particular."

"And what is that idea?"

"You can't care to hear it."

"Why not?"

"You object to me; you told me yourself friendship between us was impossible."

"Most impossible," he rejoined, decidedly; "and yet I care very much to hear about your idea."

"I mean to be a hospital nurse."

"Nonsense!"

"I thought you would laugh at me. You think me unworthy such a calling."

"I think you mad to talk of it."

"And yet you seemed satisfied with me here. I heard you tell Dr. Ward nursing came to me naturally."

"If it does there's no reason you should wear out your youth and strength in such a cause."

"But I am very strong."

"You look it!" ironically.

"And really I think I should succeed at it."

"You are much too young—and pretty."

"Both defects will be remedied in time."

"The first, perhaps—not the last."

"There is nothing I dislike so much as old maids, who persistently cherish the remains of any prettiness they may once have had."

"But you will not be an old maid."

"I shall."

"Why?"

"It is my vocation."

Mr. Anstruther looked at her fixedly.

"Then Oakdene will never be inhabited in my lifetime," he said, very fiercely.

"I don't see the connection of the fact."

"I shall not go there without my wife."

"Just so."

"And the only wife I shall take there is Linda."

Linda looked at him with scorn flashing from her beautiful eyes.

(Continued on page 64)

A NEW TOILET SOAP.—Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, the well-known manufacturers of Sunlight Soap, have for years past devoted the closest thought and attention to the consideration of the best methods for the manufacture of Toilet Soaps, and they have now succeeded in producing a quality beyond their most sanguine expectations. We have tried their "Starlight" Royal Toilet Soap, and can safely endorse all the statements made by Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, in reference to the superb quality of the soap and the delicacy of the perfume. "Starlight" Royal Toilet Soap is guaranteed to be an absolutely pure soap, a soothing emollient, and a perfect tonic for the skin, whilst it is handsomely packed and deliciously perfumed.—In fact, "Starlight" Soap is expected to be for the toilet all that "Sunlight" Soap is for the laundry.



## DOLLY'S LEGACY.

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PROLOGUE.

SOME twenty years or more from the present time Herbert Lord Desmond was master of Field Royal, a lovely estate in Northshire. Field Royal had belonged to the Desmonds for centuries—it had descended from father to son in unbroken succession for many generations.

The Desmonds were a prosperous race; their sons had married heiresses—their daughters were coronets.

All things went well with them until the present Earl came into his honours, and then society with one consent shook their heads, and murmured, "a judgment would surely fall on one who presumed thus to set the traditions of his race at defiance."

Poor Herbert's first offence was one for which, surely, he was not answerable—his name. Ever since the peerage had been created the Earls of Desmond had always been styled John. Herbert's mother, a romantic beauty of nineteen, broke through the time-honoured custom, and insisted on her boy's bearing her father's name; her husband, too much in love to refuse her anything gave way. The baby was christened Herbert, and from his infancy exhibited a disposition to run counter to all the laws and statutes of his ancestors.

The Earls of Desmond had been a healthy, warlike race—soldiers to a man in youth, fond of hunting and outdoor amusements in middle ages.

Herbert point-blank refused to enter the army; he wrote a book before he was out of his teens, and was in Parliament at five-and-twenty.

His father groaned.

"It is the prophecy fulfilled," he told his wife.

"What prophecy?"

"That when the heir of Desmond ceases to bear the name of John the tide of prosperity that has been unbroken for so many years should change, and trouble, discord, and sorrow come to Field Royal!"

"Nonsense!" said my lady, sharply; but her cheek blanched.

It may have been nonsense—it may not. The old Earl died, and Herbert reigned in his stead—a handsome, talented man, with an artistic temperament and literary tastes.

He gave up the hounds, withdrew the subscriptions to the Hunt, built a splendid music-room, and filled his house with artists and musicians.

The neighbours groaned aloud. What was to happen next? They might have forgiven Herbert if he had followed his brother's example and married a Northshire beauty; but the Earl did not seem inclined to matrimony. John had three children before even rumour could mention a lady likely to be Countess of Desmond.

The Honourable John and his wife and babies were occupying Field Royal—purely as a brotherly kindness, of course, to prevent the place going to rack and ruin, during the Earl's absence in Italy, when one snowy night a travelling carriage dashed up to the fine old mansion, and from it descended not only Herbert himself, but a young girl with violet eyes and a complexion like a wild rose.

Mrs. John stood aghast at the head of the grand staircase. What did it mean? She was soon to know.

The Earl took the stranger's hand in his and presented her to his relations as his much-loved wife, the Countess of Desmond.

Then began a time of internal misery. Mr. and Mrs. John showed no signs of vacating Field Lodge. What more natural than that they should stay to welcome their new sister, and help her to feel at home?

They played the rôle of devoted friends, and yet in a few months they had contrived to separate the young pair as thoroughly as if stone walls had been between them.

Herbert was proud and reserved, his wife sen-

sitive and tender; but, when aroused, as proud as he.

They made him think she had married him from ambition; they taught her to believe he was ashamed of her humble birth and innocence of the great world; and the breach grew so wide that reconciliation was difficult. It went on widening, until Lord Desmond's jealousy fixed on one particular person, a near neighbour of his once; he taunted his wife with the accusation that Paul Clifford was her lover!

It was summer time, and they were sitting in the drawing-room opening on to the terrace. Lady Desmond looked very ill—a perfect wreck of the fair young bride who had come to Field Royal so short a time before.

As the full sense of her husband's words fell on her ear, as she realised what it was he believed of her, she started up, and turned to him with a bitter cry.

"Herbert, I should think you mad but that I know who has poisoned your heart against me. I have loved you as few women love; but I will not remain to suffer insult. I care not what becomes of me—my life is too full of misery for me to value it only with my last breath. I assert that I have been faithful to you always!"

She passed from him through the glass doors out on to the terrace. He longed to go after her—to implore her forgiveness, to tell her he never really believed the cruel charge he had laid against her; but pride held him back. It would only make a scene if he went after her now; besides, they might be interrupted.

Oh! no—he would wait till the house was quiet for the night, and then he would go to Viola and crave her pardon. He would offer to take her abroad while his brother found a house. John Devereux had really made an unconscionable stay at Field Royal; it would be much nicer to have his home to himself.

Full of those good resolutions, the Earl was somewhat comforted. He came down before the gong sounded, and took his seat at the dinner-table as its last echo died away.

Viola was not present, but that did not trouble him; it was hardly to be expected, after the manner in which they had parted, that she should care to meet him first before strangers.

That dinner dragged painfully; the desert had been placed on the table, when a piercing scream ran through the house!

Lord Desmond started up! His first thought was that his wife must be in hysterics. Regardless of Matilda's entreaties, he rushed towards the stairs just as Viola's maid came flying down them. The shrieks were from her. Going to her lady's dressing-room with a cup of coffee, she had discovered the Countess was absent.

"What a fuss about nothing!" said Mrs. John, sharply. "I daresay Lady Desmond is in the grounds."

Susan, who had attended the Countess from childhood, and was devoted to her, hated Mrs. John Devereux most cordially.

"I don't consider it nothing, ma'am, if you do," she said, tartly. "Grant that my lady is in the grounds, she'd catch her death of cold in this storm!"

It was true enough. The day had been close and sultry; but directly after that conversation between the Earl and his wife the wind had risen, and, throughout dinner, the rain had come down in pelting torrents, while a growl of distant thunder and flashes of lightning had made each one at the table pity those who were abroad that night.

Lord Desmond looked as one distraught; he was for rushing out just as he was, in his evening suit, but Susan caught up a mackintosh and umbrella.

"You'll want them for the Countess, my lord, if you find her!"

"Of course I shall find her!"

Susan shook her head.

"She was too good for this world, my lord, and, as she was thoroughly wretched, I'm thinking maybe Heaven's been merciful and taken her."

The Earl shuddered.

The men tenants, armed with lanterns and cloaks, went forth to scour the grounds. They

had all loved the gentle Countess, and went willingly to look for her.

Susan Bennet stood with folded hands and streaming eyes.

"It's no use, my lord," was her parting shaft, "you'll never find her. My lady knew she was going to her death when she left this house."

"Nonsense, woman!" said the Earl, angrily. "You will be saying next my wife killed herself!"

"And if she has—Heaven bless her!—whose is the crime—hers, or those who made her life such a torture? Not even for the sake of her child could she bear it any longer."

"Her child!" repeated the Earl, in amazement.

"Her child," returned Susan, quietly. "You'll be thinking to persuade me next, my lord, you did not know the heir of Field Royal was expected three months hence?"

He had not known it. He forgave Susan her insolence, putting it down to her devotion to his wife.

He went out into the storm to seek Viola, conscious of a strange new link between them—a child. Surely the baby, who should be both here and his, must win forgiveness for his father! Surely, despite the sad beginning, their married life would yet be happy! And, with this hope strong at his heart, he braved the elements.

Alas! He had come up with the foremost seekers; he was going to question them, when suddenly he knew that they were whispering together, that one of them seemed to be cautioning the others to keep him back.

He broke through the group. He found they stood close to the river's bank, and there on the edge of the water lay the fleecy silken shawl he had last seen twisted round his wife's shoulders, and her dainty little shoes; a scrap of paper was pinned to them with this line, written in a trembling hand,—

"Husband—Field Royal—farewell!"

Lord Desmond was carried back unconscious to his mansion.

The servants returned in bitter sorrow, bearing those melancholy trophies.

To-morrow by daylight the drags would be set to work, but there was little hope of recovering the remains of the fair young Countess; the Way was a tidal river, and, after passing through the grounds of Field Royal, went on its course to join the Bristol Channel, and there was very little hope that the face of Viola Devereux would ever again be seen.

It was almost her husband's death-blow. He lingered some years afterwards, but he never visited Field Royal again.

As soon as he could be moved after the fatal tragedy he went to Italy, and lived there till he died.

The maid, Susan Bennet, he would gladly have retained in his service, but she told him, with tears in her eyes, that she could never bear to stay where she was reminded of her dear young mistress.

She protested also that the Countess had not committed suicide. In vain people reasoned with her, Susan held fast to her belief.

Lady Desmond might be detained by illness, or hidden by enemies; she might even be concealing herself of her own free will; but this Susan testified to the very last—she was not dead.

As Susan Bennet left Field Royal within a month of her lady's disappearance, her protestations might have been forgotten. But seven years later, at Lord Desmond's funeral, his will showed he must in some measure have shared her opinion, for everything which he had power to bequeath he left in trust for his wife, or any child proved to be hers, as though to show how he repented his cruel injustice. He named Paul Clifford, the very neighbour of whom he had once been jealous, sole trustee.

Should thirty years pass, and no trace be found of his wife, it was to be considered that she had really met her death, and the property passed to a charity.

"It is an infamous will!"

The new Earl, now the father of seven children, was the speaker.

Certainly, the will did press hardly on him.

So many of the Desmonds had married heiresses, whose fortunes did not go with the title as a matter of course, that this crocheted of his brother's reduced his income from thirty thousand to about ten, as Herbert had allowed him the latter sum. All he really gained was an empty title.

"He must have been mad!" put in Matilda.

The lawyers indignantly denied this; they said, moreover, that the Earl's doubt of his wife's death had strengthened year by year. It might be a mistake, but he could not be called mad for cherishing it.

"At least, he might have left us the use of the money for thirty years. Why, we may never profit by it!"

"You never can profit by it," said Mr. Clifford, calmly; "in my opinion, Lord Desmond left everything he had power to will away from you, as a meet reward for your treatment of his wife."

The new Countess would have liked to retort, but Paul Clifford was the pet eligible of Northshire, and she had some daughters growing up, so she said, sweetly,—

"I am sure we should be delighted if dear Viola were restored to us."

"Specially if she proved to have a living child, Lady Desmond."

Lady Desmond stared.

"Neil, Herbert's child might as well inherit his wealth as charities!"

Mr. Clifford smiled.

"If Herbert left a child, that child, be it son or daughter, must inherit Field Royal and the peerage of Desmond!"

I think no one really believed Herbert's hope of his wife's existence to be anything but the delusion of a dying man; but certainly it acted as a kind of perpetual blister to Matilda, Countess of Desmond.

Her whole life was poisoned by the fear that some day a nameless upstart might turn her and her children from Field Royal; waking and sleeping the fear haunted her.

She never saw a stranger approach the house but she believed he came to claim it on the part of Viola's child.

She took no pleasure in the beautiful estate, because she always expected it to be wrested from her.

Albeit not a religious woman, she prayed night and morning that she and her children might never be driven from their home.

Most people would have laughed at such a remote danger. Her husband did; her son followed in his steps; but Matilda did her own share of worrying and theirs too.

Could it be a righteous retribution on her for her persecutions of Viola that night and day, waking and sleeping, the thought of Viola's child destroyed her peace?

## CHAPTER I.

YEARS had passed since the tragedy at Field Royal; it had well nigh been forgotten; people had ceased to wonder whether John Earl of Desmond would ever be disturbed in his inheritance; except his wife, no one gave the matter a second thought. The world was ten years or so older than when the will was read, and had had plenty to occupy it since then.

It was just the same world as it used to be—the same cold, hard, unfeeling place, when people were poor—the same sympathetic, delightful abode when they were rich. It was just as much a crime to be poor as ever it had been before, and just as unfortunate too.

So thought a girl who stood gazing thoughtfully into one of the gay shops at the West-end, not a fortnight before Christmas. It was a bitterly cold afternoon; the air was bright, but so keen that it seemed to find out the thin places in Dolly's well-worn jacket and take a cruel delight in whistling there. Dolly herself looked hardly in keeping with the festive appearance of all around her; she was a slight, child-like creature, with masses of soft brown hair and large dark violet eyes; she might have been any age

from fifteen to twenty, and it would have been difficult to determine her social position. She had none of the tawdry finery which the lower class affect, but her plain brown dress and threadbare jacket were not the garb of the well-to-do. She was quite alone, and she stood there gazing into the bright windows as those who can never gaze enough.

She was not much given to shopping, her purse was generally too light; but the poorest of us have our festivals, and Dolly contemplated a present. It could not certainly cost much, judging from the amount in her pocket, but its selection engrossed the girl's whole thoughts as much as though she had thousands to spend upon it.

At last she went into a shop, and asked to look at a pretty trifle in the window which had taken her fancy; it was simple enough, nothing but a china egg, prettily mounted with hinges, and closing securely by a spring.

The price was not much according to the shopwoman, but half-a-crown seemed a positive fortune to the young purchaser, but her desire to possess the precious trifle was very strong; it was Christmas time, when one has a right to be extravagant.

Dolly paid away her last half-crown, and walked off the proud possessor of the egg.

But the purchase and the deliberation that preceded it had taken time. It was late now, the lamps were lighted, the streets were not deserted; on the contrary, they seemed more thronged; but a change had come over the style of the loungers. The careful mother, whose children's Christmas holidays had begun, had vanished with her little flock; the ever-moving crowd now were of a class, who though finely dressed and laughing loudly, yet give one a kind of shudder as we pass them by.

Dolly hurried on. She had a long way to go, and it was getting late. She had almost reached the end of the broad fashionable street when she felt a hand upon her arm.

The girl started; in years she was almost a child, but some mysterious instinct made her shudder under that touch as though it contaminated her. She shivered as she had never done in the most bitter wind.

"Here, young lady," said a man's voice, lightly; "you are much too pretty to walk about alone; allow me to have the pleasure of escorting you home!"

The girl never even looked at him. For her his faultless lavender gloves, his Poole-made suit, were quite thrown away; she wrenched herself from his grasp and began to walk faster.

It was an unequal struggle; he was strong and she was weak. In a few yards she had to stop, panting for breath, and her pursuer came up to her easily.

"You can't escape me, you see, pretty one. Why do you flutter like a little wild bird? I don't want to hurt you."

"Oh! let me go."

"Presently, when I have had a little talk with you. I haven't seen anything so pretty for a long time."

The girl's eyes flashed; she ceased to entreat—she demanded.

"Unhand me, sir."

"What a little vixen; but I'll forgive you, pretty one, and be more tender to you than you deserve. I shall take you in here, and we'll have some refreshments, and then I'll see you home."

They were close to the restaurant—his hand was still on her arm. Another moment and he might have dragged her where he wished, but the girl's voice broke into a piteous cry—

"Oh! help! help! will no one come to help me!"

Her cry reached the passers by, and one of them turned sharply round upon Dolly's assailant.

"Release that young lady, fellow."

"Not for you; trouble yourself with your concerns."

The next moment his hat was rolling in the road, and a heavy blow had so staggered him that he let go his hold of Dolly in sheer surprise.

She felt her hand drawn into a gentleman's, and herself lifted into a hansom cab in less time than seems possible.

Her defender was a man between thirty and forty, grave and thoughtful, with an air of melancholy about him. He was quite as much a stranger as the young fellow from whom he had delivered Dolly; but yet such is instinct, the girl knew he was to be trusted. She let him place her in the cab without even asking their destination.

"You are better now," he said, kindly, when he ceased to feel the trembling of her little hand. "I hope you have suffered no serious alarm!"

"I was so frightened. Oh! sir, how can I thank you for your kindness!"

"I did little enough; but you are too young to be out alone at this hour."

"I very seldom go down Regent-street."

"So much the better; have you ever seen that man before?"

Dolly blushed crimson.

"I have seen him," she confessed. "I have noticed him two or three times."

"But he never spoke to you before?"

"Never."

"Have you a father living?"

"No, sir."

"Nor brother?"

"I have no one but my mother."

The gentleman sighed.

"She is your best friend; tell her from me all that happened to-night, and add that she had better see you in your coffin than at the mercy of such a man as Viscount Devereux; he is a disgrace to the name he bears."

"I will tell her."

"And where do you live? I had better take you home; and, child, as you love your mother, shun the place where I met you to-day."

"I will—I will."

She told him of their home in one of the quiet streets near Victoria Station, and he was about to order the cab there, when she uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Oh! my egg; I have lost it!"

"Your egg?" asked her new friend, puzzled;

"had you been buying eggs?"

"Only one; it was a present for mother; it was white china, and, oh! so pretty."

Her distress pained him; he could not bear to see that fair face troubled. Striking a light, he stooped to see if it had fallen on the straw at the bottom of the cab. True enough he picked up the little parcel, but, alas! broken in two.

"We must get another," said the stranger, quietly.

"Oh! no," protested Dolly; "I must not get another; I will just take this home to show mother, and she will see how pretty it was!"

"Nonsense," said her companion, strangely, "I have no doubt I broke the egg in handing you into the cab; you must certainly allow me to repair the mischief I have done."

"I would rather not."

"You will hurt me by refusing."

Dolly yielded the point, and was soon smiling at his next question.

"What made you choose such a fragile present?"

"Mother is fond of eggs!"

"Palatable ones?" laughing.

"No; she has one egg like this, only I think it must be made of tin, for it has had heaps of falls, and it never breaks; it is so ugly," said Dolly, earnestly, "yet mother sets great store by it; she says I played with it when I was a baby. I can't get her to throw it away. I thought if I took her this new pretty one—"

"I see. Well, here we are at a shop, which, though not so grand as those in Regent-street, may produce what we want; will you stay here and leave the selection to me?"

She stayed willingly; but when she saw his purchase she was almost bewildered with delight. He had chosen one of those pretty golden-looking eggs which have gilt chains to suspend them to a chateleine.

Dolly was enchanted.

"Do not open it until you are at home," said



her new friend, kindly; "there is a message for your mother inside."

"For mother?"

"Aye; from me."

He kept silence then until the cab turned the corner of Elizabeth-street; then he asked, suddenly,—

"Do you go to school?"

"Oh! no," and Dolly's eyes opened wide, "I left school years and years ago."

"You look very young!"

"I am seventeen."

"Seventeen! And you live with your mother?"

"I sleep at home. I am at Madame Marguerite's all day; she is a very fashionable dress-maker, and she teaches me—I mean I am out of her hands."

The gentleman frowned; she was so young and pretty he would have liked to think of her as sheltered carefully from the world.

"And do you like it?"

Dolly shook her head.

"I hate it; some day, when I have learned the business thoroughly, mother and I are going to settle in the country; she can't bear London; I shall take in dressmaking, and she will help me."

"And shall you like it?"

Dolly sighed.

"Come," said the stranger, gently, "I can see needlework is not your ideal; tell me what you love best?"

"Music!"

"Music!"

"I think my father was a singer. Mother often says I get my love of music from him. I think if we had a piano I should be quite happy."

"And if a way were open to you to earn your living by music, would your mother let you follow it?"

"I think so. Mother does not care for music, but she never refuses me anything."

"What is your name?"

"Dolly!"

"Dolly!"

"I was christened Dorothea," said Dolly, simply, "because mother was so glad, but I have always been called Dolly."

"Do you think if I came to see your mother, and talked to her, she would let you study music?"

"I think so."

"I must not come in to-night, it is too late, and to-morrow I am going into the country till after Christmas, but you must look for me in the first days of the new year."

"Do you really mean it, sir?"

"Really."

The cab had stopped; he handed her to the ground as courteously as though she had been a lady of high degree, then he waited, bare-headed, until he had seen the door closed upon her, and drove back to his chambers, haunted by her violet eyes.

It was about eight o'clock; a little fire burnt cosily in the parlour grate, and a respectable woman clad in widow's weeds, looked up as Dolly entered. There was no resemblance between mother and child; surely Dolly inherited her face as well as her love of music from her dead father, for Mrs. Smith was a plain, hard-featured woman of fifty, a good honest face, with plenty of homely common-sense in the bead-like black eyes, but of claims to beauty in the past or present surely none.

"Child, how late you are!"

"I couldn't help it, mother, I have had such adventures. Oh! mother, I feel as if I had lived a year since morning!"

Mrs. Smith took off her child's hat and unfastened the cloth jacket, then she drew Dolly to the fire and chafed her cold hands tenderly.

And warmed and comforted, Dolly poured out her story.

Mrs. Smith seemed far more terrified at hearing of her child's danger than Dolly had been in passing through it; when she heard the name of Viscount Devereux her face blanched as though with a nameless dread, but she betrayed an almost morbid curiosity as to his appearance.

"And what was he like, dear—should you know him again, Dolly?"

"Yes," said Dolly, trembling; "I think I should; he was very dark, mother, and he had a bold bad face, but he was not very old."

"And you had seen him before?"

"Yes; once or twice, going to Madame Marguerite's."

"You must never go there again."

Dorothea exclaimed; little as she liked business, she had been taught it was her only chance of a livelihood; she could not understand her mother's rashness.

"But the premium!" she ventured to suggest;

"and, mother, I thought we were so poor!"

"We are poor enough," admitted the widow,

"but I would rather beg our bread from door to door; I would sooner see you in your coffin,

Dolly, than know there was aught between you and Viscount Devereux!"

"Why, mother! That was what he said."

"Who?"

"The gentleman who saved me."

"What was his name?"

"I don't know."

"What was he like?"

But Dolly could not describe him.

"He is coming here, mother, to see you. He will be away till after Christmas, but very early in the New Year he is coming to see you. He thinks he knows of a way by which I might earn money by music, and he is coming to talk to you about it. Oh! and he sent you a message, too."

"A message!"

"It is here," producing the egg with fond pride. "Mother, I had bought you such a pretty china egg as a birthday present, and it got broken, so he would buy me another. Isn't it pretty?"

"Very," but she spoke coldly.

"And now, mother, you will use it, won't you, to darn your stockings over instead of this horrid old thing! I hate it."

Others besides Dolly might have objected to the ancient inmate of Mrs. Smith's work-basket. It was an egg right enough, as far as shape went, but it was of some hideous metal, rather like discoloured tin. It never opened, and was useless as a box; besides, all around it was a horrid rim or edge, which Dolly always said was where people had joined it with melted lead. It was enormously heavy, very hideous, and the extreme reversion with which its owner regarded it could only spring from the fact that it had been her child's careless plaything.

"Do throw it away!" cried Dolly, eagerly;

"this new one is a thousand times prettier."

"I will use the new one surely, dear, for your sake; but I can't throw this away, Dolly."

"Why not?"

"It is very dear to me."

Dolly threw up her hands.

"The other is so much prettier, mother; see, it looks just like gold!"

"I will use it, Dolly, gladly; this one I shall look up, and by-and-by, dear, when I am taken from you it will be yours."

"Don't talk of your being taken, mother,"

cried the girl; "I can't bear it."

"It must come some day, dear."

Dolly shook her head.

"Only don't talk of it."

"I will not, only promise me one thing, my darling?" and she took up the old keepsake which was so distasteful to Dolly. "When I am gone this will be yours, my legacy to you. Promise me you will never part with it!"

Dolly promised, then she pushed the new egg coaxingly into her mother's hands.

"There's a message in it, mother; do open it and see."

The message proved a tiny pencil note.

"Your daughter reminds me of one once very dear to me. For her sake allow me to come and see you."

There was no signature. Mrs. Smith tore the paper into shreds and began to get Dolly's supper, nothing but bread and cheese, with fresh water for sole beverage; but the cloth was spotlessly clean, the knives and glasses shone brightly; there was nothing squalid or miserable about the repast.

Mrs. Smith waited till her daughter had

finished and was gone to bed, then she looked the door of the parlour and proceeded to insert the poker cautiously into the fire.

"It will soon be red-hot," she murmured. "I don't like doing this, but how else can I save my darling?—and save her I will if it costs my life."

Madame Marguerite received a note the next morning saying "Miss Smith" could not be at her duties, and soon after was told Mrs. Smith wished to see her. The successful bustling modiste wondered not a little when she saw the plain, hard-featured widow, and realised she was pretty Dolly's mother.

"I hope your daughter is not really ill?" she said more gravely than was her wont. "She seemed all right yesterday."

"She can hardly turn in bed," replied Mrs. Smith composedly; "and her face is all out in a rash. I can't help thinking it may be the small pox."

Madame was horrified.

"Poor child, what a misfortune!"

"It'll be weeks before she could come back safely," said Mrs. Smith; "and I've come to ask you, ma'am, if you'd just let her go. If she's weakly after the illness I'd just send her down into the country for a bit. I'm sure it'll be best for her."

Madame Marguerite had the name of being a hard woman of business, but she reflected. She must lose Miss Smith's services for some time; it was hardly worth while then to stand out against the mother's petition, so she gave way, taking care though to intimate she should not refund any of the premium.

Mrs. Smith breathed more freely when she had left the establishment. She turned her steps next to a large jeweller's near the Strand—one of those shops decorated by three golden balls, as a sign they are also engaged in a sadder business than the selling of trinkets. The woman was evidently known to the proprietor, for he never put her through any searching questions to know how she came by the jewels she offered in pledge. He only tested them, held them to the light, and stated the sum he was willing to offer for them. Ten pounds sounded a great deal to Mrs. Smith; she accepted the offer gratefully, and started homewards.

Dolly was in bed fretting very much over her detention there, but she had promised her mother not to rise till her return. The widow went straight to her room, bent over and kissed her.

"Dress as quickly as you can, Dolly, while I pack up. We are going away."

"Going away!"

"We must, my pretty one," murmured the hard woman, tenderly. "We can't stay any longer, it's not safe."

Dolly shuddered. Ever since she could remember her life had been that of a fugitive; she and her mother had never lived a year in one place, had never made a friend. As soon as ever lodgings began to seem homelike to her she was haunted by those mysterious words, "we can't stay any longer, it's not safe." Her mother seemed ever flying from some terrible peril whose very nature she would not explain.

But to-day, for the first time in her life, Dolly turned restive.

"Must we really go?" she entreated. "Mother, we shall miss that gentleman when he comes to see you."

"So much the better," said Mrs. Smith, sharply; "we want no strangers to come between us."

Dolly sighed. It was characteristic of the life these two had led that all their worldly goods were contained in one small trunk. Mrs. Smith paid the bill, gave a week's rent to her astounded landlady instead of notice, and departed in a cab with her daughter before the astounded Dolly had realised the fact they were going.

She held her mother's hand very tightly as they drove along, only to Victoria Station first. Here they took the train to Kensington, left the box in the cloak-room while they hunted about for rooms within their slender means.

They were not easy to find, and in seeking them the two were exposed to all the fury of the



LORD DESMOND WAS CARRIED BACK UNCONSCIOUS TO HIS MANSION.

elements. It was quite as cold as it had been the day before, and in addition to the horrors of the cutting wind, the snow came down in large flakes so fast that the ground was soon covered.

They were two hours walking up and down seeking rooms, and got thoroughly wet and chilled. Even then there was the box to fetch from the station, and a hundred and one little things to think of before they could take off their things and sit down.

"You look so ill, mother!" said Dolly, timidly. "I hope you have not taken cold!"

"I feel starved, Dolly," said Mrs. Smith, shivering. "I hope I am not going to be ill."

She had never ailed anything in her daughter's memory. No wonder Dolly was alarmed when the next morning she was too feverish to rise, and lay tossing restlessly on her pillow, with glittering eyes and blood-red spots burning in her thin cheeks.

Then began a time Dolly never recalled without a shudder. Mrs. Smith was so ill that at the week's end Dolly called in a doctor. He spoke hopefully, ordered nourishing food and care, and talked of his patient having suffered some heavy shock.

Fortunately for Dolly their landlady was a kind-hearted woman. She had known trouble herself, and instead of complaining of the extra work caused by her lodger's illness and preying on Dolly's slender purse she treated the girl almost as a daughter, and made her money go as far as money could. But, alas! the removal from Elizabeth-street, and the expense of it, had made a hole in the widow's ten pounds.

Mostly she earned a largish sum by doing lace-mending for a West-end house; but the sum, though good for woman's work, had been spent week by week. Now there was nothing coming in. Illness brings many expenses in its train.

The doctor's orders had to be carried out. It was not surprising, perhaps, that when the

third week of Mrs. Smith's illness began her daughter had changed her last shilling.

"Have you no friends?" asked Mrs. Ford, the kind landlady. "You ought to write to them."

Dolly shook her head.

"I know no one."

"Your poor mother's unconscious, you see; you can't ask her what to do."

A sudden thought came to Dolly.

"I might earn some money—just a little, perhaps. If you would watch by her to-night, Mrs. Ford, I would try."

"It's not nice to go out at night, Dolly. I'll spare the afternoon willingly to save that."

Dolly smiled sadly.

"The evening would be best," she said, quietly. "Mrs. Ford, don't let her miss me."

The weather had changed now. It was cold still, but not the bitter cold of three weeks ago.

Dolly wrapped her old jacket round her, and went out bravely, just as the clocks were striking six. Poor child! her heart ached from what she had resolved to do. Only for her mother's sake she must have money, and it was the only way of earning any she could think of.

Soon after six on that New Year's night people passing down one of the most handsome roads in Kensington—fathers returning to their families after business, young men strolling home to dress for theatres or dinner parties, any whose business or pleasure took them abroad—might have seen a slight figure standing outside one of the largest houses, and heard a girl's sweet voice singing that old ballad "Home, sweet home."

Home, sweet home! The girl who sang it had never known a home in its truest, purest sense, and on this night, when so many were making merry, she had to sing in the cold streets for money.

The contrast of her lot with theirs must have touched the hearts of some of the gay group gathered in the millionaire's drawing-room, for suddenly he blind was raised, the French window

opened, and a young girl stepped out upon the balcony.

She was beautiful as a poet's dream, in youth and loveliness. She and Dolly were alike in nothing else. Dolly's well-worn dress and shabby jacket were useful to guard her from the cutting blast; Lady Madelaine's rich fur-trimmed velvet dress set off every line of her graceful figure.

She had just come in from a drive, and was taking a cup of tea before going up to dress for dinner, and now she came out on the balcony, and tossed something on to the pavement.

"Oh, Jack!" she said, as she rapidly re-entered the drawing-room, "do go and look at her! She is so young, and her face is the prettiest I ever saw."

"Nonsense!" said Jack, coolly. "She is only a street-singer, Maddie. The prettiest face I ever saw is here!"

He was her lover, so, perhaps, his differing from her pleased her. She may have been glad he could think no face equalled hers.

She went upstairs to dress, leaving him to repair to his own room if he chose; but the song was still going on, and curiously prompted him to step out on to the balcony and look at Madelaine's protégée.

"By George! it is that girl I saw in Regent-street!"

He seized his hat, and hurried downstairs. Alas! for our hapless heroine! Madelaine's lover was Viscount Devereux, and the street-singer poor little Dolly.

(To be continued.)

It has been demonstrated that African elephants can be domesticated. They make valuable beasts of burden, as they climb mountains with remarkable ease, are sure-footed, and can swim swollen streams. They possess the further merit of being impervious to the attacks of the dreaded tea-tse fly, and they are said never to suffer from rinderpest or horse-sickness.





MARGARET WAS TOO LATE. THIS WAS, INDEED, LORD ASHDALE'S BRIDE.

## THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

## CHAPTER V.

MARGARET GRAHAM, or (to call her by the name she had borne for eight long years, and by which alone she was known at Woodbine Cottage) Mrs. Lorne, did not soon recover from the deathlike swoon in which she had been found by her servants after reading the announcement of Lord Ashdale's engagement. When she came to herself she was lying on the sofa in her own bedroom, and Dr. Ward was watching her with a very anxious face.

He was a kind old man, and from attending Nora in two or three infantile disorders, had come to seem less of a stranger to Margaret than anyone else in Penge. She often felt that if her strange and painful position had admitted of her making friends, she would have liked to know more of him and his delicate kindly wife.

Just for a moment or two memory did not fully return. The poor soul looked round the room with a troubled bewildered gaze. Dr. Ward saw she was trying to recall what had happened just before she fainted.

"Don't look so alarmed, my dear young lady," he said, kindly, "your servants found you had fainted, and being a little scared, nurse very sensibly sent for me."

"Nora!" gasped the poor mother, in anxious tones, "where is she?"

"Miss Nora is perfectly well, ma'am," interposed nurse; "she is in the kitchen watching Jane wash up, that I might be free to look after you."

Dr. Ward sent nurse downstairs to get a glass of wine for her mistress. Perhaps he wanted to be alone with his patient.

"You have had a terrible shock of some kind," he said, gravely. "Will you tell me what it was?"

He saw that memory had come back by the look of agony that crossed her face. Her

answer was short, and to a less discerning man might have sounded ungracious.

"I cannot."

Dr. Ward tried another tack.

"You are very fond of your little girl, and I think I have heard you say she has no near relations. Do you want Nora to be left motherless in this great cold world?"

"I—I don't understand."

"I will put it more plainly. It has seemed to me for some weeks now, that you were utterly neglecting your own health. I have watched you out in all weathers. I have met you tramping three or four miles from home in the pouring rain. A medical man notices things that would not strike another person, Mrs. Lorne, and it has seemed to me for some time that you were consumed by some devouring anxiety that would hardly let you rest, that you tried to tire out your bodily strength to divert your thoughts from some hidden care."

"I have had a great deal of sorrow in my life," she said, simply.

"But not of recent date. You have lived among us three years, honourably and peacefully. You have a child many people would envy you, and a sufficient income. Why worry over the rest?"

"I would rather you spoke plainly. You asked just now if I was trying to make Nora an orphan."

"And I meant it. No woman's health could stand the strain you put on yours—the utter loneliness of your life, the physical fatigue. I was not in the least surprised when I was sent for to-day. The last time I met you I wondered to myself how long it would be before you broke down."

"But I haven't broken down," she cried, "lots of people faint. It is nothing uncommon."

"But you have no pulse left, and your nerves are worn almost to nothing. You are in that state of exhaustion that you would fare badly if any disease laid hold on you. Now, Mrs.

Lorne, there is only one thing for it; you must go to bed and stop there for at least a week. You must sleep as much as possible, and take all the nourishment you can."

"And if I tell you I cannot do this. If I must go about as usual."

"Then Nature will avenge your neglect of her laws. Your over-wrought nervous system will give way. It may be brain fever or paralysis that attacks you; but I warn you either will be more than you can struggle through. I have spoken plainly, because I think you are a sensible woman."

In spite of the intolerable pain in her head, in spite of the wild throbbing of her temples, Margaret managed to review the position.

But for the doctor's words she would have started on the morrow, that night if possible, for Waldon. She would have taken her child in her hand and gone boldly to Clematis Cottage. She would have begged for an interview with Miss Leigh (a lady, suitably dressed, and a pretty little child would have appeared innocent enough visitors and gained ready admission), she would have told her whole story to Lord Ashdale's *fanette*. She would have told how, in Heaven's sight, the Earl was her husband, how Nora was his own child, and she would have begged Miss Leigh, by her own hopes of happiness, not to rob her of her own chance of regaining her good name, and removing all stigma from her child's birth.

But Margaret was, what Dr. Ward had called her, a 'sensible woman.' She knew that if she reached Waldon in a broken-down, hysterical state, her story would be far less readily believed; if she arrived at the strange place only to break down and be seriously ill her errand would have to be set aside, and how would it fare with Nora and her sick mother, in a place where they knew not one living creature except the man who would be too incensed at their presence in the town to befriend them.

During the time she was Mrs. Ruthven's companion Margaret had heard a good deal about

fashionable life, and she believed that a man of the Earl's high rank could not be married, so to say, on the spur of the moment; there would be the trousseau to order, the settlements to draw, the guests to invite. She thought that at least a month, more probably six weeks, must elapse between the public announcement of the engagement and the wedding. Better far that she should put off her enterprise than that she should persist in starting for Waldon at once and be taken ill on the road.

She turned to Dr. Ward.

"If I go to bed, and do all that you prescribe, how soon shall I be quite well?"

He altered her question before he answered it. "If you give yourself a fortnight's complete rest I will answer for it that you need not fear an immediate breakdown; only, Mrs. Lorne, it must be rest alike of mind and body."

She sighed.

"I will do my best, only, when an awful danger threatens one how can one help thinking of it?"

"Get some friend to come and stay with you," he suggested, "a little bright companionship would do you all the good in the world."

"I have no friends. Doctor Ward, Nora and I want no one but each other."

"Well, I shall look in to-morrow to see that you are carrying out my directions, and I will send you a mild sedative to-night. Mrs. Lorne, for the child's sake, try and rest."

Her first act after he left was not one of obedience; she drew her desk towards her and began to write a letter, it was very short and very simple, but it was the cry of a breaking heart. "I have seen the announcement of Lord Ashdale's engagement. I entreat you to let me know if it is true. If I hear nothing from you I shall understand that he meditates this last sin against us."

She put the note into an envelope and addressed it to Mr. Fox. She gave it to nurse and asked her to post it. The woman had been with Mrs. Lorne ever since she came to Penge, and she felt she could trust her not to gossip about her affairs. Indeed, as Mr. Fox was a lawyer in large practice, her writing to him could hardly be a strange or unusual thing. It was early on Monday afternoon when Mrs. Lorne went to bed, she felt so utterly prostrate and worn out that it was actually a relief to give up the struggle for a brief space and rest.

She did her best to follow the doctor's orders. She tried hard not to think of Waldon, not to picture Leonard, her husband, as she still deemed him, making love to another. She tried to put the matter out of her head. She did not succeed, of course, but by sheer force of will she did manage to persuade herself the delay in her appeal could not make it ineffectual. She felt better for the rest, the enforced quiet; but when the fortnight was past, and she was dressed—with nurse's help—and came downstairs, she found that she could hardly walk at all, the least exertion tired her. As to going a journey, it was not to be thought of.

"Wait a week," Dr. Ward said, cheerfully, "and you'll feel like a new creature. Go out every day. Don't tire yourself, but walk a little further each time, just as though you were learning a new accomplishment."

It was good advice and sound; but oh, how her soul revolted at the delay. By the next Monday she was feeling stronger, and early on Tuesday morning she started on the journey which meant so much to her. But her recent illness had made her careful. She took not only Nora with her, but the nurse.

"It may be necessary to stay all night," she said, gravely, "so you had better be prepared. Jane can have her mother to sleep here if she feels nervous, and then we shall be free to return or not, as we feel inclined."

The nurse was consumed with curiosity, but she had not lived three years in Mrs. Lorne's service without knowing that lady never permitted questions. She dressed Nora in her best, packed what things her mistress and the child might require, besides a hand-bag for herself, and was ready.

"If you'll believe me, Jane," she said to the house-servant, just before she started, "I've no more idea where we're going than that black kettle. It may be Land's End, it may be John o' Groat's house, but the mistress has never said."

"She is a close one," agreed Jane; "but it won't be so far as them places, or she'd never talk of your coming back to-night. Anyway, you've a beautiful day!"

From Penge to Paddington was by no means a quick journey, and after that the three were four mortal hours in a slow train (they had just missed the express) before they reached Waldon. The weather had changed then, the sky was a leaden-grey, and the rain was coming down in torrents. Nora was tired and fretful; she began to cry, and nurse had some trouble in soothing her.

"I think she's tired, ma'am," the servant said, quietly. "Perhaps you could let me get her tea somewhere, before you go on to your friends!"

Margaret's mood changed. She could not possibly take Nora to Clematis Cottage if she cried all the time. It would be impossible to plead with Miss Leigh while her child's tears distracted them both. After a little thought she took Nora and nurse to what appeared to be a quiet family hotel, and ordering tea for them in a private room, she set out alone on her fateful errand.

It was easy to find Clematis Cottage; it was only a stone's throw from the High-street, and the first passer-by directed her to it.

Margaret gave rather a disdainful glance at the little house before she knocked. It was not looking its best. Mrs. Leigh's only servant was having a kind of general cleaning preparatory to her mistress's approaching departure. The curtains were down. There was a forlorn air of desolation about the place.

"Surely," thought Mrs. Lorne, bitterly, "a girl who lives in such a house as this cannot be of grand birth. I should make every whit as good a countess as Veronica Leigh."

The door was not opened till she had knocked twice. It was four o'clock in the afternoon; but the servant, busy in her "turn-out," had not troubled to dress.

"Does Miss Leigh live here? I wish to see her."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said the girl, civilly, "but my young lady is not at home."

"Can I come in and wait for her?" In her eagerness Margaret put one foot across the threshold, but this manoeuvre was lost on the country servant.

"She is not coming back here at all, ma'am," the girl answered; "she's to be married to-morrow to Lord Ashdale, and, of course, when the honeymoon's over she'll live at the Castle. Mrs. Leigh is giving up the house next week, and I'm just cleaning it down to be ready for the sale."

Married to-morrow! Then she was only just in time, thought Margaret.

"Is Miss Leigh to be married from a friend's house, that she is not returning here?" she asked the servant.

"From her uncle's place in Essex, ma'am," was the proud reply. "Sir Lionel Leigh, of Margrave Court. It's to be a very grand wedding, and then they'll go to Paris for a tour."

Drenched through and through, with a wild look in her eyes, and two feverish red spots on her cheeks, Margaret returned to the hotel. Nurse was terrified when she looked at her.

"Dear me, ma'am, you'll make yourself quite ill again! Do sit down by the fire, and let me get you some tea."

Margaret drank it as a creature in a dream. Her one thought now was how to get to Margrave Court. Being in Essex it must be reached by the Great Eastern railway; but which was the nearest station?

The tea revived her, and she could think once more. She must not return to Clematis Cottage herself, it might excite suspicion; but, no doubt, the Leighs had left an address at the Post-office for their letters to be forwarded. She would send nurse to inquire. A respectable servant would excite less attention than herself.

The woman soon came back. She had written the address down for better precaution.

"Margrave Court,

"Near Woodville,

"Essex"

"You'll stay here to-night, ma'am," pleaded nurse; "it's raining fit to soak through anything, and Miss Nora has a cold already."

Mrs. Lorne made a rapid calculation of time. Her one chance now was to sleep in London, and go on to Woodville the first thing in the morning. To see a bride on her wedding-morning would be a far more difficult task than to make an afternoon call on a young lady who was only contemplating matrimony shortly. Nurse and the child might only hamper her movements. Better leave them here. She could trust nurse perfectly to take every care of Nora and bring her safely home to Penge the next day.

"Nurse, I think you and Nora had better stay here. I will leave you two sovereigns and the return tickets. I will speak to the chamber-maid and order a bed-room and breakfast for you both."

"I'm used to travelling, ma'am—at least, I was till I came to you—and I can find my way home with Miss Nora right enough; but I don't like the thought of your going back alone to-night."

"Oh, I don't mind it. Take good care of Nora."

Ten minutes later Mrs. Lorne was on her way back to London. Arrived there she engaged a room at the Liverpool-street Hotel, and before she retired for the night gave urgent directions that she should be called early the next morning—her husband's wedding day.

Margaret went to bed, believing that she should not close her eyes. She was mistaken. She slept the deep dreamless slumber which often follows on complete exhaustion of mind and body. She awoke refreshed, and disposed to look at things through brighter spectacles. Of course, she would be in time. Fashionable people were never married till the afternoon, and she should reach Woodville by twelve.

It appeared to be an out-of-the-way place. No quick trains stopped there, and two changes were required to reach it. No doubt in summer time, as it was on a branch of a sea-side line things were better, but now, in November, there seemed every difficulty put in the way of visitors arriving at Woodville.

To her life's end Margaret never forgot that journey. She seemed to have room for but one thought, one desire. Should she be in time. At intervals her lips moved in prayer. Surely Heaven would prove merciful, and not let her be too late.

Woodville at last. Such a tiny wayside station. It was not wonderful few trains stopped there. As Margaret stepped on to the platform she gave an anxious glance round. Look which way she would, she saw only trees and fields; houses other than the station-master's cottage there were none in sight.

"Margrave Court, ma'am," said the man who took her ticket; "it's five miles from here. The junction where you changed is the right station for it."

"But I had the address written down, 'Margrave Court, near Woodville.'"

"That's for letters, ma'am. All the Court letters go through Woodville post-office, but that's a matter of three miles from here."

"I suppose I can get a fly!"

"There are no flys hereabouts, ma'am. You'll get a trap of some sort right enough at Woodville—the town I mean—but then you'll be more than halfway to the Court."

Margaret wondered whether it was the custom in that part of the world to build a railway station three miles from the town of the same name. But though inconvenient to her, the natives found their railway arrangements answer very well. The junction (as they proudly called it) was only half a mile from Woodville High-street, though being in a different parish, was called by a different name, and the little Woodville station, with its three trains a-day, came in



conveniently for the scattered farms and tiny hamlets in the vicinity, being perhaps more used for goods than passengers.

There was nothing for it but to walk on. Margaret made all the haste she could, but knowing the ordeal before her, she dared not overtax her strength. To arrive fainting and speechless would be as useless as not to arrive at all. Before she reached the town she met an empty pony carriage, and made terms with the driver to take her to the Court. He was a tactful country youth, and could not, or would not, answer any of her questions; but he set her down at her longed-for goal, though till he drove off she did not realise that he had taken her to the servants' entrance. There was no one about, not a creature. A daring resolve came into Margaret's head, born perhaps of the driver's mistake. She would announce herself as someone from the dressmaker's with something that had been forgotten. This story would not have been believed for an instant by one of the regular servants, but the person who at last answered Margaret's continued knocks at the door was the wife of one of the grooms who had been pressed into service by the housekeeper, who was anxious to let as many of her own staff as could be spared, go to church to see the wedding.

"Miss Leigh's room!" repeated the woman. "I can show you where it is, but you'd best see her own maid and give her the message."

She took the stranger upstairs to a dainty-looking bed-room, and, without the least suspicion she was faithless to the trust reposed in her, left the stranger sitting there.

Margaret's brain felt on fire. She was in the house, in her rival's own room, but surely it must be nearly two o'clock; there was no time to lose.

Through the open door she could see another room, if possible daintier than that where she sat, and quite suddenly she heard the sound of voices there and knew that two ladies had entered it.

"You are tired out with excitement, Vera," she heard someone say kindly. "There are two hours before you need start. You must rest here, or you will be quite unfit for the journey."

"If only I might sit here quite alone and escape the crowd," another voice answered; "but mamma would never let me, and perhaps the Earl would be angry."

"The Earl can't be angry with you on your wedding day, and I think I can manage your mother. See, dear Vera, Helen has brought you some lunch, and I will come and call you myself when it is time for you to dress. Till then I promise you shall be quite alone. Do try and get a little sleep."

Margaret did not miss a single word, and yet she never suspected the truth. She imagined that the elder lady promised to call her niece when it was time for her to dress for the wedding. She never dreamed that the ceremony was over, that her rival was Countess of Ashdale by every law of church and state.

The Margrave church adjoined the Court gardens; it had been crowded with invited guests and spectators from the village. Perhaps the impressive scene had been too much for Vera, perhaps she was already upset by excitement; anyway, as she turned to leave the church on her husband's arm, she turned deathly pale and well-nigh stumbled. Lord Ashdale got her safely to the house, but he saw from the trembling of her hand that she was in no fit state to receive the congratulations of the assembled guests. He begged Lady Leigh to look after her (it was strange what a distrust he felt of Vera's mother), never dreaming that his hostess would excuse the bride from appearing at the wedding lunch and insist on her having absolute rest.

Still, when Lady Leigh announced that her niece was lying down and they must manage to eat their lunch without her, he bore the news with resignation. After all, Veronica would soon pass to his keeping for ever; he had far rather she should rest now than that she should be upset and nervous on their journey to London. He had his own feelings so well under command

that he could quite enjoy his mother-in-law's discomfort when Lady Leigh with the air of *grande dame* she so seldom assumed insisted that her sister-in-law should not deprive them of her company, as her daughter stood in no need of her, and had specially desired to be left alone.

And meanwhile, what was passing upstairs. As soon as the silence convinced her her rival was alone, Margaret rose, and gathering her courage, advanced to the door of communication and entered the inner room.

What she saw there told her her mistake. The figure leaning back in the big arm-chair was clad in robes of billowy satin almost veiled in soft, white lace. Orange blossoms fastened the long veil on the dusky hair, and on one of the thin, white hands, locked nervously together, shone a plain gold circlet, which had not long rested there.

She was too late. The truth came home to Margaret with a bitter pang. Too late! This was not Lord Ashdale's *lande* but the bride of an hour.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE exact relationship between Bernard and Leonard Maxwell was that of cousins; but most people took them for brothers, not because of a certain family resemblance so much, as on account of the great affection which existed between them.

Both orphans, both with their way to make in life, and nothing to depend upon but their own exertions, they clubbed their resources together and rented three rooms in Bloomsbury. The biggest, which boasted of a north light, served as a studio for Leonard, as well as a general sitting and dining-room. It was here, too, that Bernard did the interminable writing by which he hoped some day to make his name famous. He was the elder of the pair, and wanted some years of thirty. His great desire was to excel as a dramatic author, but at present his plays were rarely ever read by the managers to whom he submitted them, and one modest opening comédette (which played thirty minutes, and ran exactly three weeks) was the only specimen of his powers that had ever been put on the boards. As it was clear he could not live on hopes of future fame, in the meanwhile he wrote short stories and sold them—when he could. Taken as a whole, his lot was a hard one, but at twenty-seven hope springs eternal in the human breast, and Bernard was always optimistic—ridiculously so, Leonard said.

It must be confessed the latter young man was induced to look at the dark side of everything, though he made quite as much money as his cousin, and found it easier to dispose of his work. It is always easier to sell copies of well-known works of art than to dispose of original pictures by an unknown brush; but, unfortunately, this fact won't work applied to literature, for to "copy" the gems of authors is an indelible offence.

So the cousins were poor—openly and avowedly poor. They went to the pit of a theatre when they went at all (unless they had orders), smoked pipes instead of cigars, and had more than once been obliged to make acquaintance with the pawnbroker. Bernard was the braver and more industrious of the two; Leonard the better looking and more generally popular.

"What's the matter?" demanded the author, as he wrote "fins" at the foot of the last page of a short story, and looked up to find Leonard lost in a reverie, "you haven't spoken twice since tea."

"I was thinking. This is a beastly unfair world, Bernard!"

"My dear boy, it's the only world we can live in at present, so it's wiser to make the best of it. If there were various other planets waiting to be selected as our domicile, it would be different."

"You turn everything into ridicule."

"Do I? Well, Leonard, what particular proof of the world's unfairness has just struck you?"

"Do you think I am a bad looking fellow, Bernard, or a relation to be ashamed of?"

"Certainly not."

"Then don't you think that my noble uncle might have remembered my existence and invited me to join the festal throng assembled at his wedding?"

Bernard laughed.

"My dear fellow, how often have you told me you would never forgive Lord Ashdale for his conduct to your mother, and that you were heartily glad you had never seen him!"

"I am sure I thought so," said Leonard, frankly.

"I'm not quite a cad, and I believed I had forgotten my uncle was a powerful nobleman, and I was his next of kin; but I suppose I hadn't, for just the fact of his taking to himself a wife at his age (he's past fifty) fits me with righteous indignation. I suppose I had flattered myself that he could not live for ever, and that when he died I should come in for the Castle and its revenues."

"Fifty's not old for a man."

"It's old compared to eighteen, which is the age of his bride. Fancy a girl calling herself to a man thirty years her senior."

"You don't know that she did sell herself."

"It's pretty certain. She was penniless and a beauty. I wonder if I shall ever set eyes on her! Fancy having an aunt six years my junior."

"I hope she will be happy," said Bernard, dreamily.

"What in the world do you mean? Hasn't she secured a coronet and a noble fortune; what more can she want?"

"Don't be cynical, old fellow, it doesn't suit you. And so this is the auspicious day. Shall we drink the health of the bridal pair at supper?"

"In fourpenny ale? Wouldn't it be a liberty, Bernard, considering their very exalted position? There, don't trouble over my grumbling, old boy. I've had my wall out, and now 'Richard's himself again.'"

Bernard looked at him affectionately. He was devoted to his cousin, but he did wish sometimes Leonard could take the ups and downs of life more philosophically. Anyone with a firm belief in heredity might have quoted Leonard Maxwell as a proof of his theories. His education, training and circumstances had been from earliest childhood the same as his cousin's; but the Lady Lucy Dane who herself quitted a luxurious home for love's dear sake, who esteemed wealth and titles as nothing compared to her husband's devotion, had yet unconsciously bequeathed to her son all the tastes of the rich. As a peer's son and heir with acknowledged prospects and present ease Leonard would have been a most delightful member of society. As it was, it must be confessed, he would have tried the patience of any companion less forbearing than Bernard by his frequent fits of low spirits.

"Where are you going?" he asked, languidly, as his cousin rose and stretched himself preparatory to putting on a rather shabby great coat.

"I want to register this manuscript, and I'm out of tobacco. I've been sitting still all day and a stroll will do me good. Will you come?"

"Not I! It's a miserable night. I say, Bernard, be back for supper. I told Mrs. Burns we'd have a Welsh rabbit and its aroma will prove too pungent if I am left long in silent contemplation of its form."

Bernard laughed and went out. Really he had far more to be anxious about than Leonard. The little roll in his hand represented his very last "commission." When he began work to-morrow it would be with no certainty whether the productions would be accepted. He was not a celebrity. He was so far from being one that he was thankful to accept a pound a-week as reader and general literary adviser to a small Fleet-street publisher for that Saturday sovereign represented his only fixed income.

But to have seen him walk down the Bloomsbury side street, you would have thought he had not a care in the world. The cool night air was pleasant after his long day's work. There were not many people about, the rush of clerks and business men (who greatly favour lodgings in

this district) home from the office was over. The pleasure-seekers had long since started for theatre or music-hall; eight-thirty found comparatively few pedestrians for Bernard to rub shoulders with.

He had bought the tobacco and registered his precious parcel, when he became aware of a young girl a few yards ahead of him who seemed in mortal terror of something. In vain Bernard glanced round. He could see no one attempting to follow or molest her. Why did she look so frightened? Why did she pause at the corner of the pavement to gaze at the name of the street which was emblazoned on the gas lamp? Had she lost her way? Was she looking for anyone?

She held in her hand a leather bag. Painfully small if it held all her worldly possessions; but yet far too large for her to carry comfortably. She paused under the gas lamp as though to rest, and Bernard, stealing a look at her face, thought she must be going to faint, it was so white and still.

Acting on an impulse he could not resist, he went up to her, and taking off his hat, said,—

"I beg your pardon, but you seem to have lost your way. I have lived in this neighbourhood for some time, and I think I know every street near if I can be of use to you."

Once, twice, she tried to answer, but her trembling lips would hardly obey her. At last she managed to speak.

"I am looking for lodgings. I have—I mean I used to have a friend in Westcote-street, whose mother, Mrs. Hilton, let rooms, but when I got there she had gone away."

"It must have been a great disappointment to you," Bernard said, kindly, "but if it is only a matter of rooms, nearly every street near here lets them."

A vivid blush dyed the girl's face.

"I know. I have been to several houses. I can't tell you how many, where there were cards of 'Apartments,' but the women would not take me in. Some said they never let to ladies, others told me I could not be respectable to be wandering about so late and I—I got frightened."

No need for anyone to tell him that; he had known it before ever he came to her rescue.

"It is late," he admitted, cheerfully, "but then, you may have come a long journey, and of course believing you were sure of a welcome at your friend's house, you did not trouble about the hour. Do you think you would like to go to an hotel for the night and look for lodgings in the morning by daylight?"

"Oh, no," and she spoke very decidedly, "hotels cost so much, and I am very poor. I have come to London to earn my living, and I have enough money to keep me quietly for two or three weeks, but an hotel would soon use it up."

Only enough to keep her two or three weeks. Bernard's heart ached for her. Did she know how vast was the army of the unemployed in London, how great the number of surplus women? His decision was taken quietly. He could not let this poor, lonely child, roam the streets of London without a refuge. His landlady had known him for some time, and he thought she would oblige him. He knew she had an empty room, and she was an honest woman, who would make the girl's poor little board last as long as possible.

"I have lodged in Westcote-street for two years," he said, quietly, "and my landlady has a vacant room; it's a long way up, and I am afraid it may not be as nice as you have been used to, but if you liked to take it for a week it would give you time to look round."

She thanked him gratefully. Bernard fancied her eyes resembled those of a Newfoundland dog in their pleading pathos. He took the bag in his hand and led the way. He did not trouble her with conversation, only when they stopped before Mrs. Burns' door, he said, quietly,—

"Do you mind telling me your name, it may seem more natural to the landlady if I know it."

She was so long in answering that he thought she must surely be offended at the question; but at last she said, in a low, indistinct tone,—

"My name is Dean—Violet Dean."

It was Mrs. Burns herself who opened the door, and she stared at the sight which confronted her. Mr. Maxwell always carried a latch-key, so why did he ring the bell? Then, in the two years odd that he had lodged with her she had never before seen him in the company of a lady.

Bernard went to the point at once, and if he did not keep rigidly to the truth in his story his human kindness, his charity and compassion for the lonely girl were alone the cause of his lapse. "I met this young lady ringing the bell at that corner house opposite," he told Mrs. Burns, "she was a friend of Mrs. Hilton's, and had come up hoping to lodge with her. It's too late for her to go hunting for rooms to-night, so I thought, perhaps, you would take her in. I know you have a room vacant."

"It's nothing but an attic," said Mrs. Burns, "and small at that, not fit for a lady, and Mrs. Hilton was most particular; she took boarders, Miss, but she couldn't make it pay, and when her daughter got a situation in Scotland she just sold off and went with her."

"I am sure the room would do nicely," said Miss Dean, "and I should be so much obliged to you, for I am very tired."

The landlady looked sharply at Mr. Maxwell. Bernard hesitated; to claim an old acquaintance with Miss Dean might lead to further difficulties. Mrs. Burns would soon find out that he had deceived her.

"I put my character for truth at stake, Mrs. Burns," he said, lightly, "for I assured the young lady you would take her in for a week."

Bernard was always a favourite with Mrs. Burns. Perhaps this speech melted her, or else the girl's white, weary face touched her heart, for she said, in quite a different tone,—

"Well, Miss, you'd better come up and see the room; but you mustn't blame me if it's not what you're accustomed to, and as for Mr. Maxwell, he knows nothing about ladies; how should he when he's not one belonging to him?"

The attic was small, but it was clean and tidy. The poor young traveller gave a sigh of relief as she looked at it, then she asked the rent, to include breakfast and a fire. Mrs. Burns said twelve shillings a week, and then came down to ten of her own accord, observing, "You couldn't burn much coal in that grate if you tried ever so."

"I'll send up the girl with a few sticks now, for you must be pretty well chilled, and maybe you'd like a cup of tea and a snack of supper."

"Don't trouble about the fire," said the new lodger, "I am so tired I will go to bed at once; but I should be glad of a cup of tea, and will you please let me pay a week's rent in advance, as I am quite a stranger to you."

"Well, you couldn't say father," said Mrs. Burns, as she pocketed the half-sovereign, "and I'll send up the receipt with the tea. My! but you do look tired; you've had a long journey, I expect."

"Yes, my home is quite in the West of England, four hours' railway journey from Paddington."

"Well, you was lucky to meet Mr. Maxwell," said the landlady; "it's not every stranger it'd be safe to trust; but he's a man in a hundred, Miss Dean; he's lodged with me going on for three years, and I'd trust him through thick and thin."

And that night Bernard Maxwell's name figured in a girl's prayers, as one whose heart was well-nigh broken prayed for a blessing on the man who had helped her in her darkest hour.

(To be continued.)

PREVIOUS to the sixteenth century every physician in Europe wore a ring on his finger, as an indication of his profession.

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## A RESTORED INHERITANCE

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(Continued from page 56.)

"You might spare me your ill-timed marriage, Mr. Anstruther, I think."

"You misunderstand me."

"I think not," idly; "I am not good at forgetting, and I can recall an afternoon, not yet a fortnight ago, when, here in this very house, you told me I was unworthy even to be your friend."

"I never said such a thing."

"I heard you."

"Then your ears played you false. What I said was between you and me friendship is impossible."

"That means the same thing."

"No."

"It must."

"Shall I tell you what I meant?"

No answer came, no words; but the drooping of her eyelids seemed to invite him to continue, and so he went on.

"I think I fell in love with you at first sight; I only know your face haunted me as no other woman's had done. I formed a theory of my own about you, I thought you were Mrs. Ward's holiday-governess!"

"Perhaps you would have been kinder to me if I had been."

He would not answer her.

"I thought how young and fragile you looked for such a life. I believe I had a vague hoping that, being one of the doctor's family, I might help you to bear your burdens. When I came to my senses after the accident my first thought was of you."

"And mine of you," said Linda; and she would gladly have bitten her tongue out to recall the admission a minute afterwards.

"It came on me with a shock when I knew the truth, how that, instead of being poor and lonely, you were one of the greatest heiresses in England. I am not one of those who think a man must be a fortune-hunter because he marries a woman richer than himself, but when I heard you were mistress of Oakdene I felt the barrier between us was, indeed, impassable; the whole world knew how I lamented my lost home and—"

"You despoiled its possessor."

"I never despoiled you. After the first blow I liked to think Oakdene belonged to you, that your face would brighten the home I loved."

"And yet you said our friendship was impossible."

"And so it is. Linda, I love you with every fibre of my nature; nothing will content me but the like affection from you. I don't want your friendship, I won't have it. The only thing I will take from you, Linda, is your heart."

"My father," she said, sadly, "have you forgotten?"

"I have forgotten nothing. I know how you robbed yourself for my sake. You said to me, 'It is as though he had done it himself.' Linda, what does it matter whose Oakdene has been all these years so that it is now not mine, nor yours, but ours?"

He hoped he did not plead in vain; there was a dewy tenderness about the blue eyes which seemed to argue in his favour; but, unluckily, kind Mrs. Ward—who would have been the last person in the world willingly to interrupt a lover's *à-tête-à-tête*—chose that moment to wake up.

"How quiet you all are," she said, rubbing her eyes. "Has Maudie drawn the 'characters' while I have been asleep?"

"I've been ready for ages," said Miss Maud, it must be confessed in rather an injured tone of voice; "but I couldn't get Linda to listen to me. She would keep talking to Mr. Anstruther, and they spoke so low I couldn't hear a word they said."

The last clause should have been consoling, but, alas! Douglas and Miss Vane had stopped their interview at such a critical moment that there would be little repose or comfort for either till they could resume it.



Linda went up to the child's couch. "I thought you were asleep, dear!" she said, gently. "What a lot of 'characters' for four people!"

"We can each draw one, and I shall keep the rest for the children," said the mistress of the ceremonies, with grave importance. "Now, mamma, shut your eyes; you must not look the least little bit!"

Mrs. Ward drew a very uninteresting "character"; so did her little daughter; but there was a delighted exclamation from the child when she saw that Linda had got the queen.

"That is just right!" she said, clapping her thin hands. "You will be the nicest there ever was, Linda! You see, you are so sweet, no one could vex you!"

"I think some people will!" said Linda, looking at Douglas a little wistfully.

"See here, Maudie!" said Mr. Anstruther, gravely; "queens are lonely when they rule alone! Tell Linda to look round among her friends and choose a king to share her power and soothe her sorrow."

"She would have to choose you!" said Maudie promptly. "There is no one else nice enough! Besides, she told me she liked you better than anyone here; so, of course you must be Linda's king!"

Douglas looked at Linda. There was no mistaking all the tenderness of the glance; the girl was touched to her heart, and there was a pathos in her voice as she asked, suddenly,—

"Mr. Anstruther, will you be my king!"

Two years have passed since then, and Oakdene has a mistress whose beauty is the talk of all that county side, and who reigns supreme in her husband's heart.

People know, in a vague sort of way, that Douglas Anstruther recovered all his ancestral property; they do not quite understand the "how and wherefore" of this transaction; but all who have ever been his guests, all who have ever called him friend, would assure you with one voice that, dearly as he loves his home, fond as he is of the home of the Anstruthers, he holds his wife far dearer.

He is in Parliament now, and people say will one day be a peer of England.

It may be so, but Douglas will value no title his Sovereign can bestow on him so much as the one he gained on Twelfth Night two years ago at the bedside of a little child—LINDA'S KING!

(THE END.)

## IF I BUT KNEW.

—201—

### CHAPTER LIII.

"I MUST have the money, or you must suffer the consequences," Kenward Monk had written.

Rhoda shuddered, as with a terrible chill she recalled the words. She drew the curtains quickly, and then going back to the dressing-table took up the casket, and looked eagerly at its contents. A look of despair settled in her great dark eyes.

The magnificent jewels blazed on the purple-velvet—a dazzling river of light and splendour almost priceless in their worth.

Rhoda had a woman's love for jewels, and the thought of what she was about to do made her tremble. She must raise money on the diamonds; but, great Heaven, supposing anything should happen to them! She dared not allow herself to think of it for an instant.

Closing the lid down, she quickly made it into a small parcel, and put it into the pocket of her dress.

What she had to do must be done at once, while she had the courage.

"Mary," she cried, calling her maid. "I have a very, very bad headache, and I shall lie down and sleep it off. I do not wish to be disturbed, not even for my meals. Do not bring up anything for me. If I want anything, I can ring for it."

"I shall see that your instructions are obeyed, ma'am."

The girl drew the curtains, then quitted the room, closing the door softly after her.

Rhoda no sooner found herself alone than she took from her wardrobe a black dress, a long cloak, a bonnet and black veil. She quickly donned them, then stole into the corridor, locking the door after her, and putting the key in her pocket.

If she could get out of the house and into the grounds unobserved, all would be well. Fortune favoured her; no one was in sight.

She made her way to the railway station, and bought a ticket. In the train were a number of people whom she had met before. But they did not recognise her with the veil pulled so closely over her face.

Two young ladies who had been guests in her house only the week before sat directly in front of her. As the train moved out of the station, they both looked back at the magnificent mansion on the brow of the hill.

"They entertain handsomely," exclaimed one, nodding her head in the direction of the mansion.

"You mean the husband does; the wife does not understand much about it," laughed the other. "A strange couple they are," she went on. "He must surely have married her for her beauty instead of her accomplishments."

"Did it ever occur to you that there is not very much affection between them?" said the first speaker, thoughtfully.

"There is a noticeable absence of that billing and cooing which newly married people have a propensity for indulging in. She is very cold, I fancy, and if that should be the case, she will soon drive him from her side. If ever they separate, then there will be a chance for Honor Morland."

They talked on, branching at length into other subjects. But Rhoda heard no more. The iron had entered her soul. She gave herself up to her thoughts.

An epoch had come into her life. Owen Courtney had asked her to be in reality what they appeared to be before the world. If she put him from her, all happiness would be over.

The trying hour had come for her—the hour when she was to choose for good or evil; when she was to choose between the road that led to sin or its avoidance, to life of death! and she knew it.

The world seemed to stand still; but her heart seemed to beat wildly, as she thought of it all.

The train whirled on, but not as swiftly as her thoughts. She made up her mind that she would not dash this cup of bliss from her, no matter what the future held for her. There was no use in struggling against fate any longer.

She loved Owen Courtney with all the passionate love of her soul. She could not tear her heart from him.

Long hours passed by; but to her they seemed like fleeting moments.

At last her destination was reached, and for a minute she stood irresolute as she stepped upon the platform of the station. Then she timidly crossed over to where a policeman stood.

"I—I would like to be directed to a pawnbroker's, if—if you know where there is one," she said.

The guardian of the peace looked at her suspiciously.

It was a part of his business to believe all strangers dishonest until he found them otherwise.

"Are you so much in need of money as to have to resort to that?" he asked, taking in the stylish make and fine texture of the clothes she wore.

"Yes," she answered, timidly.

The policeman pointed to a shop and Rhoda started for the place indicated, after stopping to inquire when the train returned to where she had come from.

He gave her the information, and watched her curiously until she was out of sight.

"It is evident that she has come to town simply for the purpose of pawning something.

As soon as I reach the other end of my beat I will make it my business to step into Uncle Samuel's and ask what she has disposed of. It is just as well for me to know."

Meanwhile Rhoda hurried quickly on her errand.

The pawnbroker's clerk glanced up impatiently as the door opened and the dark-clad figure glided in.

He was reading a French novel, and it annoyed him to be interrupted in the midst of an interesting chapter.

He did not raise his head until she approached the counter, and said hesitating,—

"Can I see the proprietor, please?"

The well-modulated voice attracted his attention.

"Well," he said, using the same curt tone that he did to the rest of his customers, "what do you want of him?"

"I—I should like to see him, to ask if he will advance me a sum of money on some diamonds."

"Have you got them with you?" asked the man, carelessly.

"Yes," said Rhoda, faintly; "but can't I see the proprietor?"

"You can deal with me just as well," he answered.

After a moment's hesitation, Rhoda produced the package from her pocket, and unwrapping it, disclosed the magnificent diamonds.

A cry of surprise broke from the clerk's lips. In all the years of his life he had never seen anything so grand as the diamond necklace. But like all shrewd men in his calling, he carefully suppressed the cry of astonishment.

"How much do you want to realize on this?" he asked, indifferently.

"Five hundred pounds," said Rhoda, faintly.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "That's pretty good, when you know full well that you couldn't realize one half that sum on them."

"But I shall have to!" cried Rhoda.

The man closed his hand down over the lid.

"How did you come by these?" he asked.

He saw the slender figure shiver.

"You have no right to ask me anything like that," she replied.

"Probably not," returned the man; "still, when we don't ask, we generally do a great deal of guessing. But to end the matter, I will advance you a couple of hundred on them."

"I must have five hundred," repeated Rhoda.

"If it were not absolutely necessary for me to raise the money on them I should not have brought them here."

"Two hundred is a nice little sum," said the man. "If you refuse to take that, I might take it into my head to hold you on suspicion, and call in a policeman. Bear in mind, I will give you that amount of money without asking you where they came from. A policeman would want to know the whys and wherefores of the whole thing."

"I—I must raise five hundred on them," she reiterated, grasping the jewel-case.

The man's bluff had not worked.

"That's all I'll give; but father might accommodate you with a little more," he added, touching a little bell.

The summons was instantly answered by a short, stout little man who looked as if he had overheard the conversation.

A quick glance passed between them.

"Here is something for you to decide," went on the young man. "This lady tells me that she wants a certain amount for these diamonds."

"I must have five hundred pounds," interposed Rhoda, "and if you cannot advance me that amount, do not detain me, please; I must look elsewhere."

Again the lid was thrown back, and the casket exposed to the elder man's gaze. He fairly caught his breath as the blazing jewels met his eye. A wolfish expression leaped into his face.

"I think I can accommodate the lady," he said, blandly. "My motto is to please the ladies even if I have to strain a point to do so."

He placed his hand in his pocket and brought forth a roll of notes.

"How will you have the money—in tens or twenties?" he asked.

"It does not matter much," said Rhoda. He handed her a roll of notes. "You can count them, and see if the amount you wish is there," he said. She counted them over with trembling hands. Yes, there were five hundred pounds. "You will take great care of the diamonds!" she asked, eagerly.

"Certainly—certainly. They are as safe in my hands as though they were in your own keeping, lady."

She put the money in her pocket, and hurried from the place.

"Abraham! Abraham!" cried the old man, excitedly, as soon as the street door had closed upon her, "our fortune is made! This necklace is worth at least a cool twenty thousand if it's worth a penny, and we have got it into our possession for a paltry five hundred!"

"I knew the diamonds were very fine, and worth a fortune," replied the young man; "but I did not know they were worth as much as that. What do you intend to do with them, father? You will have to give them up to her if she claims them."

"Do you think I'm a fool?" exclaimed the elder man, angrily. "She'll never lay eyes on those stones. Depend on that!"

#### CHAPTER LIV.

RHODA hurried back to the station, purchased her ticket, and took the train home.

She had scarcely stepped from the booking-clerk's ere the policeman who had directed her to the pawnshop accosted him.

"Where did that veiled woman buy her ticket for? What is her destination?" he whispered.

He told him, and the officer jotted down the name of the station in his note-book.

With the money securely in her possession, Rhoda reached home. Dark had crept up; the stars were out in the sky.

She succeeded in gaining her own room unobserved. She was tired and hungry; indeed, she had not thought of food since she had left the house early in the day.

She threw off the long black cloak, the bonnet, thick veil, and black dress she had worn on her visit to town. After bathing her face in fragrant water and donning a silken house-robe, Rhoda rang the bell for her maid.

"Mary," she said, "you may bring me a cup of tea and a biscuit."

"I am very glad that you are awake at last," said Mary. "I wanted very much to tell you something; but as you bid me not to disturb you on any account, I dared not come and knock on the door, ma'am."

"You are quite right," said Rhoda, wearily, "not to disturb me. I needed rest—rest," said Rhoda, brokenly.

"I wanted to tell you about the man who was skulking in the grounds. I was hurrying along here a few moments ago, when someone sprang out from behind the rose-bushes and grasped me by the arm."

"I certainly should have cried out with terror, but he put his hand over my mouth."

"Keep still, and I won't hurt you," he said, with an oath.

"Trembling with terror, I stood still. I saw that he was a gentleman; but I noticed also that he was very much under the influence of wine."

"Tell me, are you one of the maids from the house?" he asked.

"Yes, I answered."

"Do you know me?" he questioned.

"No," I replied. "I am a stranger in the village. I have only been in my lady's employ a little more than a fortnight."

"I want you to give your mistress this," he said, producing an envelope from his pocket."

She did not add that the stranger had given her a tip to insure the safe delivery of his message, and to keep her from saying anything about it.

As the girl spoke, she produced an envelope.

Even before the hapless Rhoda saw it, she knew full well from whom it came.

Poor, hapless Rhoda! She sank down into the nearest seat, white as she would ever be in death. She did not dare open it until after the girl had gone for the tea.

She drank it eagerly.

"Please bring me another cup, Mary," she said, "stronger than the first."

"I am afraid that you have a fever, my lady," said the girl, anxiously.

"I am only thirsty. You may as well take the biscuit back; I am afraid it would choke me," said Rhoda.

"But you must be hungry," persisted the maid. "I am sure you have eaten nothing since breakfast time."

When the girl had gone, Rhoda tore open the envelope, and read,—

"My clever little wife, I am here a day earlier than I anticipated. Meet me at once in the same place. Of course you have the money by this time. Bring it with you."

She crushed the note in her hand. No one heard the gasping sigh, the bitter sob, the despairing cry she uttered. The iron had entered her soul. There was nothing but to obey his commands.

The girl had said that he was under the influence of wine.

Rhoda had seen him in that condition once before, and that was on his bridal eve, and the memory of it had never left her.

He was terrible enough when sober, but under the influence of liquor, he might be a fiend.

The girl brought a second cup of tea, which Rhoda drank eagerly.

"Now leave me, Mary," she said, "and do not come again until I ring for you."

With trembling hands Rhoda placed the money in her bosom, drew the black cloak over her shoulders, and hurried into the grounds.

Trembling with a vague apprehension, she sped by a path that was seldom used down to the brookside.

"True to your trust!" said a well-known voice.

"Fairer, cleverest of women, how can I thank you enough for your promptness?"

She stood still, cold as marble, her face ghastly white in the flickering light of the stars.

"Have you no word for me?" he cried, with a harsh, derisive laugh. "Have you no smile, no kiss, no kind word? Have you nothing to say to me? You have no love, no light of welcome in your eyes, and yet you loved me so dearly once, my sweet Rhoda. Do you remember? And now—"

"You mocking demon!" she panted "how dare you utter such words to me! I wonder you are not afraid that Heaven will strike you dead where you stand!"

"Heaven strike me dead!" he repeated.

"What a horrible idea! Afraid! Oh, no, my dear. You are the first charming creature I ever saw who flew into such a rage because her husband was pleased to be sentimental to her."

He heard her draw her breath hard. She stood before him white and trembling, her eyes filled with burning fire.

"Why have you sent for me to come here tonight?" she demanded. "Is it right to drive me mad with your taunts?"

"Do not attempt to play the part of tragedy queen, fairest of all wives," he cried, with a boisterous laugh.

"Wretch!" she answered, with a passionate cry.

"For one reason, I wanted to see you," he said—"that is certainly natural enough—and I must own, I wanted the money, too."

She drew the roll of notes from the bosom of her dress.

"Enough!" she cried, hoarsely. "You shall have it! And for that sum you will swear eternal silence!"

"Oh, yes—certainly," he replied, with a careless laugh that might have warned her that this was but the beginning of the game he was to play. "What a capital fellow Owen is, to be sure," he cried, snatching the notes from her hand; "he must certainly throw his money at you. No wonder you are unwilling to leave such a very loving husband. I am sorry I didn't make it a thousand pounds instead of five hundred!"

She looked at him in terror.

"Say, Rhoda, couldn't you manage somehow to get the rest of the money—the other five hundred?"

"No!" she answered, pitifully.

"That's only a bluff," he cried. "But it won't work with me!"

"You have sworn eternal silence now!" she cried; "you have given your oath, and you dare not break it. I cannot raise any more money!"

"Perhaps you will pay that amount for a little secret which I possess, my lady," he said, mockingly.

"There is nothing more you could tell me that would interest me."

"We shall see," he replied, sneeringly.

He pulled from under his coat a dark lantern, shot back the slide, and a flood of light illumined the scene. He drew a package from his pocket and unwrapped it. Rhoda watched him like one in a dream.

Suddenly an awful cry broke from her lips. One by one he took from the package the articles of clothing that had been worn by the little child he had secured from the village merchant's wife.

A cry awful to hear broke from her lips.

"I suppose, Rhoda, it isn't the proper thing to keep a person in suspense," he cried. "You deserted your little child—never once sought to discover whether it was dead or alive. By the merest chance I ran across it lately. I took possession of it and I have it now."

"I cannot, I will not believe you!" she answered, quickly.

"Perhaps this will convince you," he said, reading aloud a letter from the superintendent of the founding asylum where the child had been placed.

It gave a full account of all that could be ascertained of the hapless mother of the child. As he read by the light of the dark lantern, she knew that it was all true.

Her child alive!

The rapture of the thought was drowned in the horror that it was in this man's possession.

She fell on her face in the long grass, mad with misery and despair.

#### CHAPTER LV.

FOR a moment it seemed as though the darkness of death had come over Rhoda.

"My revelation surprises you," Kenward Monk said, with a most horrible laugh.

The laugh and the words recalled her to her senses. She sprang to her feet and faced him.

"Where is my child?" she cried, wildly.

"Speak, for the love of Heaven, I pray you!"

"It will cost you just another five hundred pounds to find that out. Bring me that amount here to-morrow night at the same hour, and I will give you full information. Isn't that fair enough?"

Pleadings and prayers were alike unavailing.

"Do you suppose I am going to tell you for nothing, when I can make you pay handsomely?"

"But I haven't the money," she sobbed, "and—and you know it!"

"How did you get this?" he asked.

Then Rhoda told him all.

"You were a fool to get rid of the diamonds before you had asked Owen for the money and been refused. Go to him and ask him for the money now. He does not know how to refuse a woman, and he will give it to you."

"And if I refuse?" she asked, desperately.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you and the man you love will be thrown into prison," Monk declared, "to serve a term of fifteen or twenty years. After that you cannot complain as to how I brought up your daughter, if she follows in the footsteps of her mother!"

He could not have used a more conclusive argument.

"Have you no heart, man—no mercy?" cried Rhoda.

"Come, come, I say, do not be theatrical; this



side does not become you! Better be sensible, and consider the proposition I make you."

"Is there no escape from this?" she cried, wildly wringing her hands.

Without noticing her remark, he went on,—

"If you bring the money, I will deliver up the child to your care, and all will be well with you both. I can promise still more; I can give you cause to secure a divorce from me and then there will be no obstacle to your marrying Owen Courtney if you want to."

She looked up in his face in dazed bewilderment. She did not comprehend the words. All that she realised was, that if she could get another five hundred pounds for him he would set her free, and also restore to her her little child, whom she had believed to be dead. Her emotion was more than she could endure.

"I will leave you now," he said; "but I will be here, at this same hour, to-morrow night."

"No, no!" she cried. "Give me a week to think it over, and—to see what I can do about raising the money."

"Well, then, a week if you must have it," he replied; "but no longer. Here, you can take these proofs of my story regarding your child and look them over at your leisure," he said, thrusting the package into her hand.

The next moment he was gone. She did not faint; she knew that if she did she would be found there with the package in her hand. She was so dazed, so bewildered, she never remembered how she reached the house and her own room. Again she rang the bell for Mary.

"You may bring me another cup of tea," she said, faintly, "as strong as the last one."

The girl, noticing how pale and ill her mistress looked, thought it would be best to bring her a glass of wine as well.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, she has an illness coming on. Her face is pale, but every now and then it flushes burning red."

Rhoda did not seek her couch that night until she had eagerly scanned every article of clothing the parcel contained.

Her excitement knew no bounds as she read the letter from the superintendent of the foundling asylum, concerning all that he knew of the baby's parentage, in which he stated that the doctor who had attended the young mother had brought the child to the institution in a dying condition, as he supposed, and was hastily called abroad, and had barely time to make the outgoing steamer. He had told them that they could tell the hapless young mother when she was able to hear the sad news.

Rhoda wept as she had never wept before as she read those written words, and her excitement increased as she saw that the letter was directed to the village merchant's wife, Mrs. Mayne, who had taken the child.

It was then her own child that she had clasped in her arms, the eyes of her own babe into which she had gazed with such agony and yet with such rapture.

Then another fear seized her. She had not seen the little one for weeks.

Was it ill? Had anything happened to it? She could not visit Mrs. Mayne's home until the day broke.

How came her little child in the possession of Kenward Monk?

The suspense which she endured almost drove her insane. The next morning she was up as early as the servants were.

"Daniel," she said to the old coachman, "I want you to harness up the swiftest horses you have in the stable, and take me to the village. I want to go to the shop kept by the Mayne's."

"You will not find it open so early in the morning, ma'am," declared Daniel. "The village folk are powerful lazy. They don't open their shops until nine o'clock in the mornin'. You see they have got a little wee garden back o' their place, where they raise early vegetables, and they get all through their work there long afore they open their shop."

"We will go to their garden, and perhaps be fortunate enough to find them there," said Rhoda eagerly. "Harness the horses at once, Daniel."

The hapless young mother scarcely breathed during that ride.

"Why do you drive so slowly, Daniel?" she asked, in despair. "I could walk the distance as quick as you are driving."

"I am very much surprised to hear you say that," Daniel remarked, in amazement. "Why, ma'am, the horses are fairly flyin' along. There's a lather of sweat on both of 'em already."

Rhoda did not hear his words, however, she was so busy with her own thoughts.

After what seemed to her almost an endless ride, they drew up before the village shop kept by the Mayne's.

As Daniel had predicted, the door was closed; and the blinds drawn.

"Didn't I tell you so, ma'am!" he said, triumphantly. "There they are in the garden yonder; at least there am Mrs. Mayne in the strawberry-patch, and there's her husband, off further in the fields."

"I will go to her," said Rhoda, stepping quickly from the carriage.

She made her way hurriedly through the old-fashioned garden all abloom with lilacs and hollyhocks, to the strawberry-patch beyond, where she caught sight of a sun-bonnet and a bright-hued calico dress among the green leaves.

So busy was Mrs. Mayne with her task of gathering the ripe fruit, that she did not know of the presence of her visitor until she stood beside her.

"Mrs. Mayne," said a quick, eager, husky voice, "I do hope I have not surprised you this morning."

"Well, well, you have surprised me, for a fact, I suppose you want to get something from the shop."

"Yes, I do, but not just now," returned Rhoda with feverish impatience. "Let me sit down here a few moments and talk with you."

"Certainly," said the woman; "but I haven't anything out here to invite you to sit upon save that little garden-seat which I always take about with me, so that I can rest myself when I get tired."

"It will do very well, thank you," said Rhoda, feeling so weak and faint that she could hardly stand.

She sank down on it, watching her companion, her lips twitching the while.

It seemed to her that she could not utter the words she had come to say.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mayne was wondering what had prompted the grand young lady from the great mansion to come into her humble grounds to have a chat with her.

She hoped that the villagers would see the Courtney carriage before her door.

"I have not seen you nor your little child lately," began Rhoda.

Then she stopped short, lest her quivering voice should betray her terrible anxiety.

"No," returned Mrs. Mayne. "I no longer have the little one, bless its poor, dear little heart!"

"Has anything happened to it?" asked Rhoda, the agony of death in her voice. "Oh, tell me, where is it? Is the little baby dead?"

The awful strain upon her nerves was too much. Before Mrs. Mayne could answer, the hapless young wife fell at her feet in a faint.

## CHAPTER LVI.

MRS. MAYNE was greatly alarmed when she saw young Mrs. Courtney fall at her feet. At first she thought she had swooned, but upon bending over her she found that it was only a momentary weakness. She raised her quickly to her feet, as though she had been a little child.

"The sun is too warm for you, ma'am," she said. "I might have thought of that. Pray let me take you into my little sitting-room."

"No, no! I need the air," returned Rhoda. "I have quite recovered from my momentary indisposition, and prefer remaining here, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, remain here if you wish it," returned Mrs. Mayne; "but do at least let me go to the house and get a comfortable chair for you."

"No thanks. I am doing very well," persisted Rhoda. "Pray do not go. We were talking of the little child. Tell me, oh, pray tell me about her! How did you lose her?"

It seemed to Rhoda that it took ages for the woman to reply. She leaned forward breathlessly, fairly devouring her with her dark, dilated eyes.

"Oh, no! the baby did not die," said Mrs. Mayne, "although it was a weak, puny little thing."

"I'll just tell you all about it, for I feel just like talking it over with someone."

"The child required so much care that my husband decided we could not keep it, and I was on my way to take it back to the foundling asylum in London, when the strangest thing happened."

"On the station I met a young man who used to live in the village. His name is Kenward Monk."

"Yes! yes!" interposed Rhoda faintly, feeling almost more dead than alive.

"I was telling him all about the baby, showing him the letters that came with it, and the proofs I had of its identity, when he suddenly exclaimed,—

"I will tell you in a few words what I'll do. I'll take this little one back to London, and save you the trip!"

"What would a bachelor like you do with a baby?" I asked, thinking he was joking—he was always such a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow.

"By the way, he's a cousin to your husband, though I suppose you never met him, for his uncle disowned him, and he hadn't much reason to stay in the village after that."

"Yes, yes! But what about the baby?" cried Rhoda, faintly. "You didn't let him take it?" said Rhoda and her great dark eyes dilated.

Young Mrs. Courtney bent forward with great interest.

"He offered me twenty-five pounds to give him the child then and there. We are very poor, Mrs. Courtney, and twenty-five pounds seemed a fortune to me."

"Well, I gave the baby to him, with all the proofs, and he went off in the train with it. But somehow, as the train moved out of sight, I felt a vague alarm in my breast."

"Had I done right?" I asked myself that question over and over again.

"It's over a fortnight since that occurred, but I have not ceased to worry about it, I assure you."

Young Mrs. Courtney suddenly staggered to her feet and turned away.

"I think I will not stay any longer," said Rhoda, in a strangely altered voice. "Good-morning, Mrs. Mayne!"

The next moment she hurried down the garden-path, and entered her carriage.

"What a kind-hearted lady she is!" thought the village merchant's wife. "What an interest she takes in the poor little wail! I half believe she would have adopted it herself if she had only known that I was going to send it away. I should have liked to ask her if I had done right in pursuing the course I did."

Like one wild with terror, Rhoda hurried back to the carriage and re-entered it.

"Home!" she said; and old Daniel was so surprised at the sound of her voice, it was so unnatural.

Rhoda did not see the waving grass, studded with wild flowers, through which she rode. She did not see the grand old trees nodding their great branches in the wind; she did not hear the song of the birds, or the laughter of the little children, hurrying along the highway, with their books slung over their shoulders, on their way to school.

Her thoughts were so intently fixed upon the subject which so sorely distressed her that she was oblivious to all sights and sounds.

Daniel did not see how she clutched her little hands together until the delicate nails pierced the tender flesh of the soft pink palms.

"What Kenward Monk told me is indeed too true!" she said to herself, with an inward moan.

"He has possession of my little child. Only

Heaven knows how he will use his power to crush me, and the fair, sweet, innocent babe as well!"

It seemed to her as though the very thought of it would drive her mad. She knew she was in his power, and that he would certainly use that power to extort every penny from her that he possibly could. And then, when there was no more money to be gained, what would he do?

She avoided Owen during the next few days, lest he should repeat the question he had asked when he last talked with her.

He watched her in wonder. Her apparent coyness amused as well as surprised him.

"There is no way of understanding women," he said to himself. "To-day they are eager for something; to-morrow they will not have it!"

He was surprised when he received a message from her one day, asking him if she could see him alone in the library.

He sent back a reply in the affirmative, and awaited her coming with some curiosity, no doubt entering his mind as to what she wished to say.

It was some time before she put in an appearance. He was not aware of her presence, he was gazing so intently out of the window, until she stood by his side.

"Mr. Courtney," she began, hesitatingly, "please pardon me for intruding upon you; but I could not wait."

He looked down wonderingly at the lovely young face so strangely pale.

"Would it not be as well for my wife to address me as Owen?" he asked, with a grave smile.

She looked up at him and tried to utter the word; but somehow it seemed as though she could not.

My wife!

How those words cut her! If they had been the sharp thrust of a sword they could not have cut her deeper.

His wife!

She would have given everything in this world if indeed it were true that she was Owen Courtney's wife.

Another face rose before her vision—a fair, handsome, sneering face,—and she drew back with a shudder.

He noticed it, and the kindly words he was about to utter were hushed on his lips.

After placing a chair for her, and taking one near it, he waited for her to proceed.

"I—I have come to ask your indulgence in a little matter," she said, faintly.

"Yes?" he said, kindly.

For a moment there was silence between them—a deep, painful, awkward silence, which was broken at length by Rhoda.

"I have been looking over some furniture," she said, tremulously, "and—and I could use just double the amount of money you gave me. Would you be very, very angry if I asked you for five hundred pounds more?"

He threw back his head and laughed outright.

"One would think, by the manner in which you express yourself, that you were suing for some great favour, the granting of which you doubted."

She looked at him with dilated eyes, the colour coming and going in her face.

She could not understand, by his remark, whether or not he intended giving it to her.

He turned at once to his desk, saying,—

"I will write out a cheque for the amount you wish."

"No; not a cheque, please," she answered, piteously. "I would so much rather have the money."

He looked surprised.

"I haven't the amount you wish," he said, "I have not half that amount probably. I always use cheques in preference to carrying money about with me."

He was quite mystified at the look of terror that crept into her eyes.

"I must have it in cash," she said, imploringly.

"Could you not get it for me somehow?"

"Yes—certainly," he replied. "When will you want it?"

"To-night," she answered, piteously.

"You shall have it," he answered.

But there flashed through his mind a suspicion he would have given anything to have removed.

## CHAPTER LVII.

OWEN COURTNEY thought long and earnestly after Rhoda had left him; "What can Rhoda want with the cash, and in so short a time?"

He put on his hat, went round to the stables, and ordered his horse. A caunter over the hills would drive away these gloomy, unhappy thoughts.

He took another road from the one he was accustomed to taking.

The sun had crept to its zenith, and was now sinking toward the west as he reined his horse before a little village inn.

Everyone knew Owen Courtney. The proprietor of the hotel warmly welcomed him. He had concluded to rest a little and refresh his horse.

As he lighted his cigar and sat down in the porch, the first person he saw was Edith Montague.

"I am really so delighted to see you, Mr. Courtney," she said, in her pretty lisping accent. "Not more pleased than I am to see you," he returned, gallantly.

"I had not expected to see you before the fourteenth. We have not had an acknowledgment of the invitation to our ball which we sent you and your wife a week ago; but I feel sure you won't disappoint us. We count upon you two as our most particular guests."

Owen flushed hotly.

"Oh, certainly," he said. "I hope you will pardon my not answering your kind favour at once. I will see that my wife writes you and accepts the invitation."

"We intend to make it a grand affair," said Edith. "In fact, the ball is to celebrate the betrothal of my sister and Captain Edmonds. There! It's a secret! But don't you dare tell anyone except Rhoda."

"I am very glad to hear of the engagement, and I heartily congratulate them. I think they are admirably suited to each other. Captain Edmonds will make a good husband, depend upon it, and your sister will make him the most charming of wives."

"I think Rhoda suspected something of it. Didn't she?" asked Edith roughly.

"If she did, she has not mentioned it to me," he replied.

"Do you know, I really thought she liked Mr. George Dalrymple at one time," rattled Edith.

"But, no! for everyone could see, Mr. Courtney, that he had no eyes for anyone but his hostess."

Owen looked uncomfortable. The conversation had taken a turn not exactly pleasing to him.

"By the way," went on Edith, "I saw Mr. Dalrymple only yesterday. We went to Richmond to do some shopping, and the first person I met was Mr. Dalrymple. I am sure he tried to avoid me, though he says he didn't. I told him about the ball, as I did not know where to send the invitation to him. I told him that you and Mrs. Courtney would be there, and that all we now needed to make the affair as pleasant as the one at your house was his presence."

"I will come if I can," he said; "but don't feel hard toward me if I should fail to be there. I have a matter of considerable importance on hand for that date, and I do not know just how I will be able to arrange it."

"Oh, please break the engagement, and come to our ball, Mr. Dalrymple!" I insisted.

"But he would not give me any more definite answer. But I want you to use your persuasive powers, and write him to be sure to come. If Rhoda were to write him he would not refuse her."

Again that uncomfortable sensation crept over Owen as he listened to those words.

The thoughtless young girl had meant no harm; but her words had worked great mischief.

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Owen drove slowly homeward. Although he tried to banish Edith's words from his mind, yet they still haunted him.

What was George Dalrymple doing in Richmond? He was more puzzled over it than he cared to own.

As he rode up to the door, he saw Rhoda on the verandah, talking to a group of friends. It then struck him, as it had never struck him before, that his young wife was very handsome; and he was beginning to wonder how it was that he had been so blind as not to see that which was attracting the attention of every one else.

She wore a tight-fitting dress of pale-blue silk, with a crimson rose in its bodice. She held a bunch of roses in her white hand. There were several other ladies present, but not one of them could compare with her.

For the first time since his marriage a feeling of exultation stole into his heart at the thought that this peerless creature belonged solely to him.

They were speaking of the grand ball the Montagues were to give, and commenting on what they were going to wear.

"How about you, Mrs. Courtney? What are you going to wear? Don't keep what you are going to wear a secret, and then spring some wonderful creation upon our wondering gaze."

"I assure you," said Rhoda, "that I have no intention of doing anything of the kind. Indeed," she declared, earnestly, "in sending out the invitations, I am sure they have forgotten us!"

At this juncture, Owen stepped forward, saying: "Is there any excuse a man can offer for forgetting so great a favour as an invitation to a grand ball? That is exactly what has occurred. I received the invitation for the Montagues' ball one day last week. I should have taken it direct to my wife, but you know that 'procrastination is the thief of time.' It has proved so in this case. I laid it down, and in the press of other matters, I forgot it. My papers must have covered it, and the matter entirely escaped my mind until to-day."

"Of course you will go!" remarked the ladies in chorus.

"Oh, yes; we are sure to do so," he responded.

A little later he found Rhoda alone in the drawing-room.

"I do hope you will look your best at this particular ball," he said. "Any number of my old friends will be there. I want you to wear your most becoming dress, and all the family diamonds."

Rhoda had been looking down calmly at the roses she held. But as mention of the diamonds fell from her husband's lips, a change that was alarming came over her face.

She grew white as death; her eyes lost their light. The roses which she held fell to her feet.

"Why, Rhoda, you look as if you were an occasion for sorrow instead of one of joy," Owen remarked.

"What is the date of the ball?" she asked.

"The fourteenth," he responded.

Again that ashen pallor spread over her face, leaving it white to the lips.

That was the date upon which Kenward Monk was to bring her child to her.

What was the great ball to her compared with this event?

But, Heaven help her! she could not tell her husband of it.

She thought of the lines:—

"Ah, what a fatal web we weave  
When first we practice to deceive!"

She was thankful that Owen was called away just then, or she would have fallen at his feet in a faint. He had said, "Wear the family diamonds." Heaven pity her! It was a wonder that those words had not killed her.

She could not go to the ball. She must make some excuse. She would wait until the last moment, and send Owen off alone, and after he was gone she would make all possible haste down to the brook-side, and await the coming of Kenward Monk and her little child.

While in the village Owen had got the money she had asked of him. He had handed it to her enclosed in an envelope.



Oh, how kind and good he was to her! How very despicable it was to deceive him! But what could she do! Fate was against her.

Owen could not help but notice the intense excitement under which she laboured during the time that elapsed to the coming of the ball. She longed, yet dreaded, to have the day arrive.

The day came at last, bright and clear. There was no cloud in the blue sky; the sun shone brightly in the heavens. She was glad that there were several guests at the house, as her husband would not have much opportunity of observing her.

How that day passed she never knew. One moment she was as white as death, the next she flushed as red as a rose.

"Heaven help me to live over the excitement of to-day!" she murmured, clasping her hands tightly.

She prayed for the noonday to linger. But time, which stays at no man's bidding, rolled on. The sun went down in a sweep of crimson glory; dusk gathered and deepened into the darkness of night.

Seven o'clock sounded from the pearl-and-gold clock on the mantel. Seven o'clock resounded from the great brass-throated clock in the main hall.

"Mary," said Rhoda to her maid, "go down to the library and tell Mr. Courtney that I am indisposed and cannot go with him to the ball, but that I earnestly pray he will go without me, and enjoy himself. Say that I wish particularly that he should go; and notice what he says, Mary, and come back and tell me."

It seemed to Rhoda that Mary would never deliver the message.

Why did she linger! At last the girl returned. "What did he say, Mary?" she asked, breathlessly, fixing her startled eyes eagerly on the girl's face.

"He made no reply, ma'am," returned Mary, "but I am sure he will go, since you so earnestly requested it."

(To be continued.)

## FACETIE.

DAUGHTER: "I have a scratching, burning feeling on my cheek." Father: "Tell him to shave more frequently."

ARTHUR: "I see in *Answers*, dear, that married people get to look alike." Kate: "Then you must consider my refusal as final."

"WAGNER is not so bad, after all." "Why?" "They say he has never written anything that can be whistled."

BIKECLISTS IN THE PARK.—He: "Well, how are you getting on?" She: "Oh, I'm getting on all right. It's the coming off that's so annoying!"

FATHER: "Do you think I ought to have my daughter's voice cultivated?" Guest: "I should think you ought to have something done for it."

FRIEND: "Is your baby intelligent?" Newps: "Intelligent! Why, if she wasn't she'd never be able to understand the language my wife talks to her."

SEN (anxiously): "Tell me quickly, what was papa's answer! Did he smile on your suit?" He (bitterly): "Smile is not the word. He simply roared with laughter."

"WHAT is interest?" "Interest is what a man pays you when he borrows your money." "What is usury?" "Usury is what you have to pay a man when you borrow his money."

LADY CUSTOMER: "Are you sure this is real Ceylon tea?"—Well-informed Young Salesman: "Certainly, madam. Mr. Ceylon's name is on every package."

MINNIE: "Fred, I wish you would decide as to our settling down at this hotel—I know that it's worrying you. Fred: "My dear child, it isn't the settling down—it's the settling up that's worrying me."

MR. INQUIRE: "Where are you going to, this fine morning, Miss Jones?" Miss Jones: "Shopping." "Indeed! What are you going to buy?" "Oh, nothing; I'm going shopping."

NEGATIVE: "How do you know he is dishonest?" Positive: "Dishonest! Why, I once saw him playing at solitaire, and he couldn't play the game without cheating."

A NEWCASTLE man had just said to a friend, "Let's take another—" when his wife turned the corner; but his duty to his wife was not forgotten. "View of the political situation," he added.

SHE: "I thought Mrs. Ford was a widow." He: "So she is." She: "Why does she wear such loud bloomers! Where are her weeds!" He: "Oh, she's no weed widow. She's a genuine grass widow."

"I've just come from a regular toper's breakfast," said Cholly. "What's that?" "Oh, a chop, a brandy-and-soda, and a dog." "What in the world was the dog for?" "Why, to eat the chop."

"ARE you aware, sir," said the man in the rear fiercely, "that your umbrella is poking me in the eye?" "It isn't my umbrella," replied the man just in front with equal fierceness. "It's a borrowed one, sir!"

JINKS: "I want to buy a dog. I don't know what they call the breed, but it is something the shape of a greyhound, with a short, curly tail and rough hair. Do you keep dogs like that?" Flander: "No. I drown 'em!"

"WHY did you leave your last place?" "The missus called me names." "What did she call you?" "She said I were a domestic, mum; and me as hard-workin' and honest a woman as ever lived!"

MAUD: "I would like to look at some canes." Dealer: "Yes, miss. What kind of head do you want?" Maud: "I'm not particular. Only it must be of a material that will not poison his mouth."

MRS. MANYCOOKS (severely): "Didn't I hear a man talking loudly with you in the kitchen just now, Mary?" Mary (complacently): "Oh, hope so, ma'am, for thin Ol can call yez as a witness in a case av bralch-av-promise suit, ma'am."

STOUT MAN (whose appetite has been the envy of his fellow-boarder): "I declare I have three buttons off my vest." Mistress of the House (who had been asking to give him a hint): "You will probably find them in the dining-room, sir."

THE country clergyman was nailing a refractory creeper to a piece of trellis work near his front gate when he noticed that a small boy stopped and watched him with great attention. "Well, my young friend," he said, pleased to see the interest he excited, "are you looking out for a hint or two on gardening?" "No," said the youth, "I'm waiting to see what a parson do say when he hammers his thumb!"

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## SOCIETY.

THE King of Greece when conversing with the members of his family, never employs any but the English language.

THE Czar has forty-four different uniforms, one of which he has never had occasion to wear—namely, that of a Russian field-marshal.

KING OSCAR of Sweden and Norway is to-day the only monarch who occasionally dons his crown. His Majesty wears it every time he faces the Parliament of either of his two kingdoms.

PRINCE ALBERT of Schleswig-Holstein comes to England at Whitstable, on a visit to Prince and Princess Christian at Cumberland Lodge.

THE Princess of Wales will come to Marlborough House for the season, with Princess Victoria and Princess Charles of Denmark, about Thursday, April 28th.

THE Princess of Wales is staying at Copenhagen with the King and Queen of Denmark at the Amalienborg Palace, where the Empress Dowager of Russia is also lodged.

PRINCESS LOUISE of Wales, Duchess of Fife and the Duke of Fife have promised to open a bazaar at the Empress Rooms, Royal Palace Hotel, Kensington, on the 4th of May, in aid of the Society for Providing Homes for Walls and Strays. The Duke and Duchess of Fife's new Scotch residence, Mar Lodge, is likely to be in a fit state for tenancy next autumn.

THE Duke of Albany has not returned to Park Hill School, near Lyndhurst, where he has been for some years a pupil with his cousin, Prince Alexander of Battenberg, but has gone to Eton since the Easter holidays. This arrangement has been made by the Queen, who is the supreme authority in everything connected with the junior members of the Royal Family.

PRINCESS BRITANNIA is to pay a visit early in the summer to the Count and Countess von Erbach-Schönberg at Schloss Schönberg, their beautiful place on the Bergstrasse, which has several times been visited by the Queen when staying at Darmstadt, and which is within a few miles of Heiligenberg, Prince Louis of Battenberg's chateau near Jagenheim, which was given to the late Prince Alexander of Hesse by his sister, the Empress Marie of Russia.

It is reported that a marriage is likely to be arranged between Princess Beatrice of Coburg and Prince William of Saxe-Weimar, who is the eldest son of the late Hereditary Grand Duke, who died in 1894. The young Grand Duke is twenty-two, and very rich, while, after his grandfather's death, he will be immensely wealthy. The reigning Grand Duke will be eighty in June. The Hereditary Grand Duke is at present heir presumptive to the throne of the Netherlands, and another matrimonial theory for him is a marriage with young Queen Wilhelmina.

THE engagement of Princess Pauline, daughter of King Wilhelm II. of Württemberg by his first wife Princess Marie of Waldeck-Pyrmont, to the Hereditary Prince Friedrich of Wied, is one of the most interesting of recent Royal betrothals, for there is really a strong personal attachment between the young people, and reasons of State have had little to do with the match. In fact, it is said that Princess Pauline has refused to contemplate several ambitious matches proposed to her, and has always announced her intention of marrying to please herself, as well as of choosing a husband whose position will enable her to spend much of the future at her father's Court. Prince Friedrich, who is twenty-six years of age, is the eldest of the three sons of Prince Wilhelm of Wied, and is an officer in the 3rd Prussian Garde Uhlanen Regiment. He is described as of handsome and striking appearance, and possessing exceeding winning manners. His mother was, before her marriage, Princess Wilhelmine Friederike Anna Elisabeth Marie of the Netherlands, and although she has been known all her life as Princess "Marie" simply, it is an interesting fact that every one of her children received by her husband's wish, the names of "Wilhelm Friedrich" and "Wilhelmine Friederike" respectively.

## STATISTICS.

THERE are 27 Royal families in Europe, two-thirds of which are of German origin.

CANADA supplies about one-fourteenth of the imported food of Great Britain.

A HORSE will eat in a year nine times his own weight, a cow nine times, an ox six times, and a sheep six times.

In the period from 1871 to 1897 the capacity of the mercantile navy of Great Britain has increased from 7,900,000 to nearly 22,000,000 tons.

The proportion of men to women in France is more equal than in any other country in the world there being 1,007 women to every 1,000 men.

In London no fewer than 188,000 people live four and more to the room, and of these 8,000 are packed to the extent of eight or more to the room.

## GEMS.

It is more wholesome for the moral nature to be restrained, even by arbitrary power, than to be allowed to exercise arbitrary powers.

In our judgment of human transactions the law of optics is reversed; we see the most indistinctly the objects which are close around us.

A CHARACTER which combines the love of enjoyment with the love of duty and the ability to perform it is the one whose unfoldings give the greatest promise of perfection.

EVERYONE must know that his best life is his silent life; his truest growth, his silent growth. What I am, what is my life, myself, is inside; and inside is all the work done that fashions me. The soul is not made as the statue is, with click of hammer and chip of chisel from without; but the soul is made of its own ingrowth, as a peach is.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CREAM CHEESE SALAD.—Moisten cottage cheese, if rather dry, with a little milk; roll in the hands into tiny egg-like balls. Serve on lettuce leaves (half-dozen balls for each), with a French dressing. With them serve white or brown bread sandwiches cut very thin, with a slice of cucumber which has been dipped into the dressing, between them.

PEANUT AND CHEESE SANDWICHES.—Shell and skin sufficient fresh roasted peanuts to make a small cupful when pounded or rolled. Sprinkle them lightly with salt, and mix them with enough cream cheese to hold them together. Spread this on squares of thin bread. These sandwiches are particularly nice served with lettuce salad.

HOT CHARLOTTE.—Butter a pudding-dish, then line it with bread and butter cut moderately thick and dipped in milk—not soaked in it. In the centre put any kind of fruit—stewed apples, peaches, apricots, or prunes stewed and pitted. On top have a layer of bread and butter. Bake this about half-an-hour in a moderate oven. Turn it out on a flat dish; sift powdered sugar over it, and serve hot with hard sauce.

SALMON TO KIPPER.—Empty it and scale and split it; rub it over with common salt and Jamaica pepper, and let it drain for 24 hours; mix together common salt, a little saltpetre, and a little coarse sugar, and rub the fish well once or twice with this; leave it to pickle with the skin down for two or three days, then wipe and stretch it on sticks and hang up to dry; it may be hung in the smoke of a peat fire or juniper bushes or wood fire, or merely dried in the sun; the head is taken off and most of the bone before it is kippered; salmon is in season from February till August, and they may be kippered when they are best and cheapest.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

In India butter made from the thin milk of the native cow is blue, instead of yellow.

A SILK factory in which only women are employed has been opened in a suburb of London.

ONE of the provisions of the French Code forbids a doctor to inherit property left him by a deceased patient.

THE Isthmus of Panama is said to be gradually sinking, owing to the continuous earthquakes which take place there.

A NOVEL sort of window-glass has been invented. Persons on the inside of the house can see through it, but it is opaque to those on the outside.

In the Tyrol the Government still pays head-money for the extermination of poisonous snakes. It is the only European Government which does so.

In a big mass of clear amber dredged up out of the Baltic Sea recently there was distinctly visible in its interior a small squirrel—fur, teeth, and claws intact.

POROUS glass is one of the latest novelties. The holes are so small that neither dust nor draught follows its use, and yet the ventilation is said to be excellent.

A MERCHANT has hit upon a novel method of protecting his cashbox from marauding fingers. He sprinkles the box with a powder which has the peculiar effect of dying the skin blue, the colour being merely intensified by washing.

ASPARAGUS was originally a wild sea-coast weed of Great Britain and Russia, and is now so plentiful on the Russian steppes that the cattle eat it like grass. In some parts of Southern Europe the seeds are dried and used as a substitute for coffee.

LAMP-SHADES are not needed on a newly-designed chimney, which is formed of a series of prism rings moulded in the surface, with the flat side turned downward—to throw the light in that direction, and prevent its shining in an upward direction.

In the public schools of Switzerland heat holidays have been established by law. Recognising the well-known fact that the brain cannot work properly when the heat is excessive, the children are dismissed from their tasks whenever the thermometer goes above a certain point.

In Africa the prefix serves for the purpose that the affix serves for in European languages. For example: Spain, Spaniard, Spanish—so in our mother tongue; but in Africa, Uganda is the name of a State, Waganda are the inhabitants thereof, and Maganda the language.

EXPERIMENTS have been made in photographing by the light of fireflies. A large number of them were placed in a small box and confined by a netting. The box was provided with sensitive plates, and in some instances covered closely in order to discover the power of the light emitted by these insects. It was found that they have a quality not unlike the X-rays, as the plates that were closely covered showed unmistakable evidences of photographic process.

A NEW idea in washing-machines is a metal cylinder, in size and shape not unlike an ordinary pail. One end is open, the other closed, with the exception of two holes, about three-fourths of an inch in diameter, which have leather valves fitted on the inside. To the middle of the end provided with the head is attached a long handle. This device works like a pounder when it is pressed down upon the clothes in the tub or barrel; the pressure closes the valves, and the air is compressed with sufficient force to carry it down through the clothes. When the pounder is lifted the valves open and admit more air. The inventor of this plan claims that it costs but the merest trifle, and is pronounced by those who have used it one of the most efficient machines they have tried. Another washer has a series of rubber rollers, through which the clothes pass. The water is literally squeezed out of them; then they absorb more water, and by this process the dirt is rinsed out.



## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**ALF.**—Look in the London Directory.  
**A. E.**—We do not give trade addresses.  
**BERT.**—Any bookseller would supply you.  
**A. C.**—It is an illegal and punishable practice.  
**A. F.**—Such recommendations are never given.  
**ANXIOUS.**—We do not give advice in such cases.  
**A. M.**—They are given in almost all almanacs.  
**BERT.**—Wash the hat in a hot solution of soda.  
**A. R.**—Apply to a good newsdealer in your city.  
**RODIE.**—The society's rules govern the question.  
**F. R.**—There is such, we know, but we have it not.  
**DOLLIE.**—Double the amount of salt would not be too much.  
**R. F.**—A deal of gift must be drawn up by a solicitor.  
**OLD READER.**—The process requires very costly machinery.  
**G. K.**—The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill has not been passed into law.  
**FRANCIS.**—The works you speak of have long since been dramatised.  
**QUEENIE.**—It all depends upon the taste and means of the engaged pair.  
**GERTIE.**—Vinegar diluted with a little water is an excellent cleanser.  
**L. V.**—Quite impossible for us to say whether the charges are too high.  
**ROSEBUD.**—"Plevin" is an obsolete word, meaning a warrant of insurance.  
**CLAUDIA.**—If genuine, of great value, but there are many fraudulent imitations.  
**O. B.**—Much depends on the wording of the agreement; submit it to a solicitor.  
**REGULAR READER.**—It would be better to have them transferred to your present name.  
**KITTY.**—Wash it through a fine sieve and wash it in four or five changes of fresh water.  
**PURPLE.**—Clergymen have taken medical degrees, and in that case are entitled to use them.  
**R. B.**—The trustees or executors of the will cannot withhold any part of a legacy from a legatee.  
**A. B.**—Nearly all the residents of Montreuil, France, are engaged in the manufacture of dolls' heads.  
**BOLEYN.**—Situations in banks cannot be obtained without influence with the managers or directors.  
**BOB.**—The Duke of Clarence died on January 16th, 1892, and Cardinal Manning on January 14th, 1892.  
**B. R.**—The usual notice is a fortnight. You can sue for the money in lieu of notice in the County Court.  
**CHARLES.**—Snakes and other reptiles are the only animals which seem to be able to exist without drink.  
**A. L.**—Wash off the whole work, glasspaper it clean, and treat the parts with a hot, strong solution of soda.  
**LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."**—No injury unless left in a damp place, but very little damage caused rust.  
**FLORIE.**—A newspaper is a capital thing to rub with; it absorbs the grease and polishes at the same time.  
**MED.**—The vinegar left over from pickled walnuts and onions is invaluable for flavouring stews and hashes.  
**VERY ANXIOUS.**—You could not do it without purchasing costly apparatus and then learning the method.  
**E. L.**—The immediate result of such a foolish practice would be to ruin your digestive system and produce chronic ill-health.  
**NAT.**—No one should emigrate who has not courage sufficient to face the necessity of hunting up a situation in the new country.  
**TRICKED.**—He will not be punished for giving his age incorrectly when enlisted, but he is not released on account of being under age.  
**N. L.**—The creatures known as ocean hydre have no heart, no lungs, no liver, no brain, no nervous system, no organs save mouth and skin.  
**HOUSEWIFE.**—If thickening other than vegetables used is deemed advisable, brown the flour for all soups save chicken, veal, and oyster soups.  
**PATRY.**—Coal tar is a product obtained in the making of gas, hence sometimes called gas tar; it is as surely explosive, but not dangerously so.  
**BIDDY.**—The shelves need constant watching in order to keep them sweet and clean. One cannot be too particular with this useful piece of furniture.  
**E. R.**—A domestic servant may give the month's notice at any time. The mistress is entirely wrong in saying that the notice can only be given on pay-day.  
**M. F.**—Boah is a Turkish word, signifying empty, but in the Turkish language it is pronounced with a long, which gives the term quite a different sound.

**IS DOUBT.**—If a friend ask a favour you should grant it, if reasonable; but if it is not, tell him plainly why you cannot. You will wrong him and wrong yourself by equivocation of any kind.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—All practical information as to British colonies may be obtained from the Emigrants' Information Office, 81, Broadway, London, S.W.

**MILLIE.**—A young man who thinks more of a little money than womanly worth does not promise to be a good husband to any girl, rich or poor. Dismiss him from your regard.

**HOLIDAY MAKER.**—It is not necessary that you should be able to speak German in order to spend a holiday in Hamburg; you will find plenty of people there speaking English fluently.

**NAN.**—You must work steadily with the finest glass-paper all over the entire side where the scratches are till you get below them. Nothing else will take them out.

**RALPH.**—The letters op or the word opus (work) followed by a number at the head of a musical composition signifies the number of works produced by the composer—e.g., opus 20, 40, &c.

**WEATHER-WISE.**—A red sunset indicates a fine day to follow, because the air when dry refracts more red or heat-making rays, and as dry air is not perfectly transparent, they are again reflected in the horizon. A coppery or yellow sunset generally foretells rain.

**RHODA.**—The little white spots which sometimes appear on the finger-nails are due to some subtle action of the blood, upon which all the bones, sinews, muscles, and organs in the body are dependent for nutrition. In reality, they signify no derangement of the system.

## LOVELY, SPOTLESS, LITTLE FLOWER.

LOVELY, spotless, little flower,  
 Sparkling in the bridal bow,  
 Never, never yet before  
 On Time's dark and stormy shore  
 Did thy joyous parents see  
 Such a light as shines in thee!

How we dote upon the shrine  
 With a jewel so divine!  
 How we pray that never storm  
 Falls on such a beautiful form!  
 How we ask that nobest work  
 Crown thee from thy happy birth!

Lovely, spotless, little flower,  
 Sparkling in the bridal bow,  
 May thy mother's kindly grace  
 Paradise thy goddess face!  
 May the manhood of thy sire  
 Firmest with noble fire!

Such our prayers!—An angel's wing  
 Is around thee murmuring,  
 And its music scatters joy  
 On thy sweet brow, gallant boy,  
 Whispers "Heaven will guard this flower  
 Of the sacred bridal bow!"

**AMATEUR COOK.**—Hard-boiled eggs make a nice salad by cutting them into small pieces, adding half as many cold-boiled potatoes as there are eggs; cover them with a mayonnaise dressing, and scatter capers and chopped parsley over the top.

**BEGINNER.**—Keep the smoke as far as possible from the eyes and nose; the longer the pipe the better; the use of a short pipe during work is to be avoided. A pipe is the most wholesome form of smoking, a cigar the next, and a cigarette the worst.

**UP-TO-DATE.**—What you want is, of course, a book on elementary chemistry. If you apply to a good book dealer, he should be able to tell you name of book and also price. He would also be able to tell you about the medical book you wish.

**POLLIE.**—Put it on in hot (not boiling) water and boil quickly for five minutes, then draw to the side of the fire and boil very gently for two-and-a-half hours for six pounds; it should be very slowly boiled; ten pounds will take about three hours or three-and-a-half hours to boil.

**NINA.**—There is nothing creditable or attractive in the conduct of young women who are given to doing unusual and rather questionable things. It is very much better to conform to the requirements of the society in which you live and move. While there is no sense in keeping girls in leading strings, and never allowing them to rely upon themselves, there is a wholesome restraint in exercise of authority without arbitrary requirements, that is not only beneficial but necessary to the healthy growth and well-being of every young person.

**HOUSEKEEPER.**—Take one pound icing sugar and put it in a basin after having taken all the lumps out; put in about three whites of eggs, and with a wooden spoon beat till the sugar is all wet; a teaspoonful of lemon juice may be added, and when the sugar is all wet (it may need more white of eggs) beat the whole with the back of a wooden spoon for twenty minutes; it should be thick and creamy; this can be spread all over the cake, smoothing it with a wet knife; then what remains should be put into a forcing bag and tube, and the cake decorated with that; this is one of many different icings for cakes.

**CINCY.**—Soak the rabbit for about a quarter of an hour in salt and water, then wash it and dry it well; pull out the liver and heart and put them aside, cut off the head, take out the eyes and divide the rabbit into joints; it should be in ten pieces, of which the legs make four; rub each piece over with flour till it is quite covered; put a good desertspoonful of sweet dripping in a stewpan, let it get hot and fry the pieces of rabbit all round in it; chop up a middle-sized onion and a large sprig of parsley and sprinkle them in, also add the head, liver, &c.; salt and pepper enough to season it, and lastly one-and-a-half breakfast-cups of water, stir it about a little in the pan till it boils, then put the lid on and let it stew slowly for one hour and a quarter, dish it in a nice heap on a plate, putting in head and inferior pieces in the bottom; take two ounces of bacon ham and cut it in rather small slices, put it on a hot frying pan to fry for two or three minutes, and place it neatly round the rabbit.

## ALEX. ROSS' SKIN TIGHTENER OR TONIC.

The application of this to the face removes wrinkles and the crow's feet marks, giving a youthful appearance. 2s. 6d., sent secretly packed for 50 stamps.—62, Theobald's Road, London, W.C. Ear Machine, for outstanding ears, 10s. 6d.; post, 11s.

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ALL LETTERS to be addressed to the EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 25, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

\* We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

## BRINGERS OF GOOD NEWS.

WE all know what Shakespeare says about the first bringer of unwelcome news. On the other hand, how thankful we are to the first bringer of *good* news. Be sure there is never any "sullen-bell" sound from *his* tongue thereafter. Not to *our* ears at any rate.

Why, only the other day, being among the docks, I happened upon the identical steamer that carried my wife and me on our wedding tour. She (the boat I mean) is getting old now, and I couldn't help noticing that some repairs and a coat of paint would have improved her looks; but there! explain it as you may, I stood on the dock one mortal hour feasting my eyes on the venerable craft, and letting my fancy dwell on the day of days when one other person and I crossed the sea on board of her, with Youth at the prow, and Happiness at the helm.

So it is with us all everywhere. The value and interest of things are largely determined by the principle of association. If I should, for example, come upon a paragraph in a certain newspaper to-morrow morning, saying that a distant and hitherto unknown relative had died and left me a large fortune, you can lay odds on one thing—I should subscribe for that paper the balance of my life; yes, even if it was dead opposed to my ideas on politics.

That's why I think Mr. Frederick Plank will always have a warm spot in his heart for the paper that brought good news to him; not about money, but something of greater importance.

"In August, 1890," he says, "I took a severe chill on the kidneys, and had excruciating pain at the loins and back. I soon began to feel weak and heavy, and had difficulty in getting about. My appetite was bad, and after meals I had fulness at the chest, and a horrible pain at the pit of the stomach.

"I had difficulty in passing the secretion from the kidneys, and often it was of the colour of blood. In a little time I came to be so weak I was obliged to give up my situation, and was treated by a doctor in Bath. He said I had an acute attack of Bright's Disease. He gave me

medicine, but it relieved me only for a time and then I was as bad as ever.

"Now better, now worse, but never properly well, I continued until June of last year (1896), when I had to abandon my work entirely. My condition was now very serious, and I was so weak *I had to sit in a chair all day long*, being unable to stand or walk.

"The secretion was now the colour of ink, and mixed with sand, and I was in pain all over me. I wasted away, as you might say, to nothing, and no one thought I would get better. Then I had a Bath physician attending me, but got no better.

"In November (1896) I read in a paper, *The Messenger of Health*, of a case like mine being cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle of this medicine from Mr. King, chemist, Twerton, and after taking it experienced much relief. My appetite came back, food agreed with me, and I had less pain.

"I followed on with it, and soon all the pain at the kidneys left me, and the secretion was natural. When I had taken four bottles *I was in sound health*, and have since kept well. Beyond a doubt Mother Seigel's Syrup saved my life, and I wish others to know of it. You may publish this statement and refer anyone to me. (Signed) Frederick Plank, 21, Brougham Hayes, Twerton, Bath, April 6th, 1897."

Surely in this case *The Messenger of Health* deserved its name, as it was indeed a messenger of health to Mr. Plank. Now, if the reader will ask his chemist for any one of the multitude of certain little books that are scattered all over the country (free for the asking), he will learn exactly *how and why* Mr. Plank was cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup after all other medicines had proved so useless and disappointing; for a full explanation would be too long and complicated to give here. Yet the *principle* of it is plain and easy to understand.

Meanwhile, let us appreciate and encourage all bringers of good news—people and papers. No question but the page on which you read this will turn out to be a messenger of health to somebody.